

THE OFFICIAL  
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Introduction by Arsène Wenger

## **Opus eBook Editions**



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# INTRODUCTION



# **‘I feel like the head of a family’**

Being manager of Arsenal is like a marriage. It just becomes part of your life. You don't imagine yourself anywhere else. In the first years you think: Will it work? But after a while, it just becomes like your family. That's what Arsenal is to me now.

Arsenal is an amazing mixture of traditional values and yet the Club has had the courage to move into the modern world. It is a Club of tradition, of values, of conservative spirit. But if you look at the actions it has taken, it is one of the boldest clubs in England. It has made amazing decisions, appointing me being one of them. Also the building of Emirates Stadium, the establishment of the training ground at a time when it was not so obvious. Arsenal Football Club is a wonderful mixture of style, tradition and modernity.

People say I have changed Arsenal, but the Club has also transformed me. I used to want to be successful personally; now I want the Club to do well: not for myself, but for the Club itself. It has made me less self-absorbed. I feel like the head of a family.

Yet it has not made me any less passionate. More. The sense of responsibility is more now because expectations are very high. When I first came here I was not conscious of what Arsenal Football Club really represented. Now, when I see the enormous number of people who want this Club to do well, who are sad when we don't do well, I am much more conscious of my responsibility.

My hope for the future is that this young team, on the verge of growing together, fulfils my ambition to become the best in England. We want to win the Premiership again and we know we can win in Europe because we have already been in the Champions League Final. In fact, my ambition is to win the Premiership, again, and the Champions' League. Preferably in the same season. And preferably as soon as possible.

I am first for stability. We have had some difficult moments as we have adapted to the new stadium, but it is all part of the growing process. In football, you go through periods when it is a little less easy. We have had some exceptional moments, we have had some disappointing moments. But we showed the mental strength of the team, and we will take that forward as

motivation for all the seasons to come.

The Premiership has changed very much since I first arrived. I am very proud that I helped a little bit to contribute to that. I am very proud to be part of the most admired football in the world. People may not realise how popular Arsenal are all over the world. We have built fantastic credibility, but, of course, that only lasts with consistent performances and that is always our target.

I am always excited by building a new team and building new success. My energy level never dwindles. It might one day, but not at the moment. I work hard to be extremely fit. I live like a football player. Maybe even better. I would not be in discos at night. It is compulsory if you want to have a consistent level of motivation and performance. Every day you have to have the energy to respond to all the problems you meet. You need to live like a guy who prepares for a marathon on Saturday.

This job is a massive marathon and demands physical and mental strengths. You can only achieve that if you live a really dedicated and serious life. What refreshes me mentally is my love for the game. I love to be out in nature, on a good pitch, watching the players. There is no better stress cure than that. Sometimes I like reading books, but not much. It is watching football that gives me most pleasure.

This life is beautiful because it is not predictable. What was predictable was that my passion for football could lead me anywhere in the world. I was ready to go anywhere. It amazes me when I think back now, but from a very young age – maybe seven or eight – I knew I would not live in my village. I always felt myself that I would have an international life. I would go anywhere to visit the world. That's my character. I wanted to travel, to learn languages, to see other people. I felt my destiny very early was to have a life full of adventures.

I feel I have an affinity with our fans. From the start, they supported me. They were always behind me. There was a special relationship. This showed their amazing courage because they had never heard of me before, and I was French. Sometimes relationships just work.

They understand my feelings, which sometimes I demonstrate on the pitch. I can say now that I am determined to keep my emotions under control, but I cannot guarantee that. I feel that the team is ready to deliver. But when you feel that the team is under threat you become a little bit more nervous. It is difficult. Passion has to be part of the game. If you sit there and don't say a word, people say: 'Look, he doesn't care'. When you come out and want to win, people say: 'Look, he is too nervous, he should keep every word under control'.

Yet I think people in this country understand. It is the character of the nation. You say England, I say passion. You say Germany, I say determination. You say

French, I say subtlety. You say Spain, I say pride. So England for me is passion. It's a country of football and music. I think that's what I have in common with the fans.

Football is a sport where you live in the present. But don't think I will ever forget Highbury – it will forever be in my heart. It was like my home, my garden. It is 10 years of my life. Exceptional years. And the exceptional soul of that stadium will never leave me.

**Arsène Wenger**

*Emirates Stadium, June 2007*

**1.**

# **The final salute**

The last match at Highbury produced high drama on an emotional day for Arsenal supporters, and it was a fitting way to end 93 years of football at the stadium

# **Sun sets on Highbury**

**Sue Mott bids a fond personal farewell and recalls the day her father first took her to a 'special place' at the age of 10**

At the end, there were just a few of us left. Dennis Bergkamp was one of them, in a seat in his box at the Clock End. Silently staring out at a scene he would never see again. The rest were sitting in ones and twos around the stadium, little matchstick figures, drinking deep of the special atmosphere one final, nostalgic, time. Remembering. Last relics of all the crowds down the years, 1913-2006, who had filled the terraces and the seats at Highbury, a stadium, a cathedral, a theatre and our home.

What began as a rickety stage for the transplanted Woolwich Arsenal, with neither dressing rooms nor running water for the players, was ending here, on May 7, 2006, at the beloved Highbury stadium. It was ending with a perfectly choreographed 4-2 victory over Wigan Athletic, including a Thierry Henry hat-trick and a rousing farewell to Dennis in his final competitive match. The sun was setting behind the West Stand, lowering the lighting in the stadium like a stagehand. The vast majority of the 38,359 crowd had ebbed away to reminisce over a pint or supper with friends. They could look back on an afternoon of brilliant sport and better sportsmanship, as the Wigan supporters stayed behind to join in the Arsenal celebrations, clad in their free blue T-shirts that said simply: "I was there." Such a touch of class. The rest of the crowd, the Arsenal majority, had arrived in their seats to find the same sentiments expressed on red or white T-shirts (size large) and the result decked the stadium in candy stripes, all the better to celebrate the long goodbye.

The post-match entertainment was rousing, especially the march past of 80 heroes from down the years. They entered the arena proudly – and alphabetically – reliving days, some long past, some barely over, when they had the honour of playing for the Arsenal. Some were a little weightier than we remembered them. Geoff Barnett, the mad-cap goalkeeper who would surge from his goal area on ill-advised upfield runs, had a camera round his neck, bouncing up and down on his paunch. Alf Fields, aged 87, had played with Cliff Bastin in the 1930s and won the British Empire Medal for his part in World War II. Charlie George, our hero. George Graham, our anti-hero, dressed immaculately as ever. Pat Jennings, Eddie Kelly, Martin Keown, Anders Limpar. Different ages, different shapes, different styles, different fates. Together in homage to a special football place.

Frank McLintock, one of the greatest captains Highbury had ever seen. Pat

Rice, one of the most loyal-serving men Arsenal has ever produced. Alan Sunderland, one of the most outgoing hairdos that ever played in a Wembley final – but now almost completely bald. Time may have tampered with our heroes, but not with the memories they inspire. The last three: Tony Woodcock, Ian Wright, Willie Young. Some triumvirate. Clever, prolific and ginger, in that order, but all of them more than that. Remember Woodcock. Not entirely accepted, but still Arsenal's leading goalscorer in the 1980s, who once scored five against Aston Villa. Remember Young against Tottenham after his much-maligned transfer from our deepest rivals, flame-haired and battle-hardened, winning Arsenal hearts with every clattering tackle. And passionate, incorrigible, motor-mouth Wrighty, still in love with the Club, and the fans with him, after 185 goals.

They all gathered on a podium at the centre of the pitch not, for once, attracting the wrath of the groundsman. The perfect playing surface, the sheet of green baize, would need his protection no longer. His mind was already elsewhere, two roads away, beneath the rim of a stadium that looked like a spaceship, just visible behind the roof of the West Stand. Arsenal's new home. Emirates Stadium. Opening on July 22, 2006, for Bergkamp's testimonial game.

But that belonged to the future. This day was a commemoration of the past, so the gathered assembly counted down together – players, managers, supporters in tribal unison – the last 10 seconds of Highbury's life as home to a football club called Arsenal. On zero, fireworks flamed into the sky, one last burst of noise and action in effervescent honour of one of football's finest landmarks. A silence descended, a deep and reverent hush as individual minds flew back down a tunnel of years, some all the way through colour to the black-and-white past when Alex James enthralled the cloth-capped masses with his wizardry and Herbert Chapman was masterminding not just a club but an ethos – not just a team but a legend.

All those years peopled with the uncles, fathers, friends and neighbours that first brought us to the place. We thought of them and then the glorious floodlit nights like the one when Arsenal discarded the shackles of mediocrity and became the European Fairs Cup winners in 1970 to gloriously kick-start the modern era at Highbury. So many silver moments since: FA Cups, League Cups, Championships, Doubles, a European Cup Winners' Cup and, soon, the final of the Champions League, Arsenal's greatest continental adventure with Arsenal's greatest intercontinental team. So many changes, yet so much the same. The emphasis on tradition, the acknowledgement of the past, the unswerving dedication to success, the appropriation of the absolute best. Alex James would have accepted Thierry Henry in a heartbeat. Both ingenious ball players and



both, after all, from foreign fields. (Half the team never did fully understand James's broad Lanarkshire brogue.)

Everyone felt the tug of history on the evening that Highbury was decommissioned as a place of sporting combat. Henry, the most prolific goalscorer in Arsenal's history, and Ashley Cole, the boy from Hackney who came through the ranks, sat on the podium together, lost in their own private thoughts long after the other players had left the field. We thought they might be thinking of leaving. We feared they might be thinking of leaving, especially in the case of Henry. In the end, Cole did depart but, for Thierry, Highbury, and all it stood for, was a hard place to leave.

You always remember your first sight of Highbury. Charlie George was six and instantly entranced. Arsène Wenger was the manager of Monaco and thought the taxi driver was lost, so deeply were they entrenched between little London houses. Bob Wilson was a trainee schoolteacher and gasped as though the Sistine Chapel had just been revealed to him between a narrow gap in north London buildings. I was 10 and when Dad said we were going somewhere special, I thought he meant the Wimpy Bar in Muswell Hill. That is where we usually went when he was on babysitting duty, a marvellous venue where the sauce came in giant plastic tomatoes. But this time he drove on. Down a labyrinth of ever-narrowing streets, houses pressing closer and closer together as though huddling for warmth and gardens shrinking to a size that barely gave them room for a dustbin. Suddenly, we were confronted by a giant white cliff. I vaguely thought we had arrived at Dover. "There!" said my father, reverentially. And indeed there it was, rising up before my eyes, the home of a dynasty, painted red and white, with the letters AFC carved with angular pride above the front double doors. Highbury.

It was a weekday in the school holidays. No match was on. The place seemed eerily silent, as do all stadiums when feet are not clattering up the stairwells, seats are not filling up, the air is undisturbed by the roars of the crowd and the field is devoid of its entertainment. But there was something especially hushed about Highbury. As though so great were the feats of athleticism behind these doors, so deep was the repose in between. Some hope. This was 1967 and Arsenal were conspicuously average. They had dominated *Quizball*, a television game for football teams, thanks to Ian Ure's proper Scottish education, but having finished seventh in the First Division and been knocked out of the FA Cup by Birmingham City, the outcome of their day job was disappointing.

This had been the case for some time. Dad, who had played for Barnet in the Amateur Cup Final in the 1950s, would frequently arrive home on a Saturday evening bemoaning 'peg-legged bloody footballers who couldn't shoot straight'.

Mum and I took no notice. But something happened the day I was taken to Highbury, something that must have happened thousands of times to thousands and thousands of others over the years. I took an interest, I went to a game, I fell in love. You don't know if you will be a susceptible one when you go to your first game to watch the Arsenal. You know only that you are dressed up to an almost ludicrous degree in a home-knitted red and white scarf so thick with wool it looks more like a giant bow-tie and with a rosette pinned to your coat that says simply: Arsenal. No fancy puns in those days. In my case it was Arsenal v Charlton Athletic in the fourth round of the FA Cup on January 25, 1969. We won 2-0 with goals from Jimmy Robertson and Jon Sammels and that was it. I was an Arsenal fan.

It doesn't always happen like that, I was to discover. Over the years, I forced all kinds of school friends to visit the hallowed territory of the North Bank, expecting them to genuflect in the joy and honour of the occasion, and yet all of them remained completely unmoved. One got lost and I had to wait for her in the police room at the Clock End. One, unfortunately wearing a West Ham United scarf, was disgracefully hit in the face and was returned to her mother with a bump the size of an egg on her forehead. And one, our school lead for all the Gilbert and Sullivan productions, sang Good Old Arsenal in faultless soprano to my undying embarrassment. They were hopeless. It never occurred to me that I was the hopeless one, in my denim jacket and mock Doc Martens, scarves tied limply round my wrists in sartorial echo of the hard-man fashion of the time. It didn't occur to me because I had never been so comfortable, so attached, so belonging in my life. To be an Arsenal supporter was to be tribally represented by the greatest club on earth. That is how it felt anyway.

It was my wonderful good fortune to start supporting the Gunners just as they were moving from grimness into glory. I vividly remember the grimness, encapsulated by that 1969 League Cup final against pushover lower-league Swindon Town when I attached a homemade banner to the pelmet board round the living room only to see Don Rogers surge through the mud at Wembley like a motorised hippo and inflict a humbling defeat on my newly-discovered heroes. That is when you discover, even if you think you want to stop supporting a football club, there is a terrible momentum to the process. You've started, and you'll finish. Stopping is not an option. Luckily, several things then happened at once. Charlie George made the first team, Frank McLintock stopped losing Cup finals, Geordie Armstrong was inspired by the purchase of poor Peter Marinello, the pretty winger from Hibernian who advertised milk, and I was old enough to work in Jones the Bakers on a Saturday morning, thereby earning the seven shillings and sixpence necessary for admittance to the North Bank.

It was the greatest moment of every fortnight, the sight as you climbed up the stairs from the turnstiles in Avenell Road and suddenly appeared at the summit of the North Bank with the pitch, the filling stands, and the acres of descending steps punctuated by crash barriers all the way down to the goalposts. Hope was renewed. Radford could score, Kelly might be playing, Charlie would wave when we designated him the King of Highbury in song, as we did every game, choosing to ignore rival fans who inquired about his handbag. The fact that Arsenal went on to win a Double – so much more rare and precious in those days when money and talent were more evenly divided – within two years of the Rogers debacle, having already claimed the Fairs Cup in 1970, is a minor miracle. Perhaps a major miracle. But between Bertie Mee's management, Don Howe's coaching and a team's bonding, the feat was achieved at Wembley in May 1971. I was there, with Dad, in a red-and-white checked smock that made me look like a propped-up table and felt the kind of ecstasy that comes maybe two or three times in a lifetime. We were standing behind the goal that Charlie scored in. My especial hero, so tired in the sunshine he would have been more use cheering from the touchline on a stretcher than clogging up space on the pitch, yet summoning the backlift from somewhere to send the winner steaming past Ray Clemence in extra time. Then he lay down, a horizontal hero accepting the homage of his team-mates.

It was a day of pure happiness as yellow and blue streamers were attached to the Cup and McLintock's run of four Wembley defeats was finally avenged. I could have been forgiven for thinking it was always like this. You supported a team, they promptly won three trophies and would then win the European Cup. It wasn't like that. It never is. Arsenal failed to win the European Cup the next season because, although John Radford was pleased that they drew reigning champions, Ajax Amsterdam, in the third round – his wife was Dutch – nobody else was. Down 1-2 from the away leg, George Graham scored. Unfortunately it was an own goal and there went the European dream.

From there, Arsenal's form in Europe was patchy to missing, partly through their own efforts and partly owing to the lengthy ban imposed on English clubs after the deaths at Heysel Stadium for which Liverpool fans had been blamed. In the league they finished 5th, 2nd, 10th, 16th, 17th, 8th, 5th, 7th, 4th, 3rd, 5th, 10th, 6th, 7th, 7th, 4th, 6th. Liam Brady had come and gone; David O'Leary was part-way through his record 722 appearances; Pat Jennings had crossed the big divide from Tottenham Hotspur; Malcolm Macdonald had been supremely, productively selfish, then injured; Alan Ball had briefly reigned; Kenny Sansom had become Terry Neill's most inspired buy; Charlie Nicholas had first dazzled then annoyed his manager; George Graham was busy drilling his defences like a

corps of the Royal Marines. And then Arsenal went to Anfield, May 1989.

There is no moment quite like it in the history of Arsenal Football Club. No moment that had all the same ingredients of heart-stopping drama, indomitable endeavour, formidable opponents, live television coverage, Brian Moore's commentary and a down-to-the-wire, heart-in-the-mouth, scream-inducing climax that became a book, a film and a story for the grandchildren all rolled into one.

It was a match that began not on the centre spot but a knife-edge. It was a rearranged fixture, the last game of the season, Liverpool were top of the League by three points, Arsenal second with a marginally inferior goal difference. After much consultation with calculators it came to this. Arsenal had to win by two clear goals. But, as the sign says: "This is Anfield". Liverpool had won their last 10 games at home and they were seemingly inspired by the terrible tragedy of Hillsborough, when many of their supporters' lives had been lost in a tragic crush before their FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest.

Any Arsenal fan alive on that momentous date can conjure the images from Anfield at will. Smudger's glancing header from an indirect free kick, the Kop singing "We're gonna win the League", the injury to Kevin Richardson in the 89th minute, Steve McMahon's finger telling his team-mates "just one more minute", the resumption of play with Brian Moore saying: "Just a few more seconds for Kenny Dalglish unless Arsenal can mount something spectacular", Smith flicking a canny pass into the path of Mickey Thomas, his run into the penalty area, the bobble of the ball, the diving figure of Bruce Grobbelaar, the chip over the goalkeeper, the age – stretched out into eons – that the ball took to cross the line. Then madness, jubilation, hysteria, parties in the street outside Highbury, *Fever Pitch* the book and Nick Hornby, the author, becoming, deservedly, a millionaire. Ironically, Mickey Thomas did not. But then footballers were not international business conglomerates in those days.

What followed could have been an anticlimax. But thanks to the arrival of a professorial Frenchman, with a streak of Teutonic efficiency, the last 10 years of Highbury were extraordinary. George Graham had changed his personality to become a successful manager of Arsenal. Arsène Wenger changed Arsenal's personality to preside over the Club's greatest period of success. From dour and effective to devastating and adventurous. From roundhead to cavalier. From footsoldier to dashing swordsman mounted on a charger.

The same eyes that had watched Peter Storey prey on opposing shins were now lighting up to Dennis Bergkamp's spectacularly silken skills. Under Wenger's tutelage, Arsenal won two Doubles, one Premiership title in 2004 when "Les Invincibles" finished the season unbeaten and so many FA Cups at

the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff, that the team almost added Welsh to their spoken languages. Dad didn't quite live to see Arsenal's modern doubles. He died in March 1998. When Tony Adams scored his incredible goal against Everton that May to make the final score 4-0 and seal the Premiership title, I sat in the top tier of the East Stand wishing he was still there to share the elation and wonderment of a new brand of football. I owed him so much.

A love of a football club is as tangible as an heirloom, handed down from generation to generation. When my father took his little daughter to Highbury for that first game against Charlton, and willingly took her back week in, week out, first-team games, reserve games, even a Youth Cup final, he gave her a gift that will last a lifetime. He said Highbury was special. He wasn't wrong.

Amazing to think that there in the stadium that Sunday night in 2006 were characters who remembered, who even played with, the grand likes of Alex Wilson, Wilf Copping, George Male, Jack Crayston, Herbie Roberts, Ted Drake, Eddie Hapgood, Joe Hulme, Ray Bowden, Alex James, Cliff Bastin (the team that won the 1936 FA Cup). The team that had just beaten Wigan Athletic in the last competitive Arsenal match at Highbury were slightly less short-backsides, slightly more financially robust. Jens Lehmann, Ashley Cole, Sol Campbell, Kolo Touré, Emmanuel Eboué, Robert Pires, Alexander Hleb, Gilberto, Francesc Fábregas, Thierry Henry, José Antonio Reyes. Seven different nationalities represented, with two more on the bench. But Herbert Chapman would have been the first to embrace the modern way. He had been ahead of his time. The Highbury to which we were saying goodbye was the legacy of that far-sighted man.

The clock was his, the beautiful art deco stands, the under-floor heating in the dressing room, the renamed Arsenal Tube station, the floodlighting, the insistence on high-quality fittings for a high quality team. His stamp was everywhere, even 72 years after his death, and no wonder the late Club secretary, Bob Wall, used to think that the ghost of Chapman still walked the corridors of the stadium. He swore the presence of the old manager remained just as surely as Chapman's old bowler hat that would one day be donated to the Arsenal museum.

The unbroken timeline communicates itself even to the players. Charlie George always viewed Highbury as his spiritual home, but even Thierry Henry, born in France of Caribbean parents, has claimed he can feel the murmur of ancient matches when he stands alone in the empty stadium. They are gone, but still there, just off stage stirring the memory. He had played his part, Henry, in making that last game particularly unforgettable. So many reasons to be cheerful before the final parade. Not least the fate of our neighbours, Tottenham Hotspur,

who had begun the day as favourites to take the fourth and last berth in the Champions League for the 2005/2006 season. Their nearest rivals were their dearest rivals, Arsenal.

How fate had scripted the showdown. If Spurs had won against West Ham at Upton Park that afternoon, Arsenal would have been playing in the Uefa Cup the following season. The ball was at Spurs' feet. But it wasn't their feet that had a problem. Half the team was suffering from a stomach bug. Highbury was afire with rumours. That Spurs' game would be delayed, that it might even be postponed. In the event, the Premiership insisted that the show should go on. Both games kicked off at 3pm. By 3.08 Arsenal were 1-0 ahead, Robert Pires scoring his last Arsenal goal in his swansong game. A minute later Carl Fletcher scored for West Ham at Upton Park to redouble the jubilation. Then began a protracted case of switch-backing fortunes, one set of circumstances visible before our eyes and the other trackable only by rumour and radio. A match and a ghost match. Forty-four players at any one time fighting for the season's happy ending, with Arsenal fans singing *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* to emphasise their comradeship with the Hammers on this occasion.

**3.10pm** Arsenal 1 Wigan 1. Highbury gasps in horrified disbelief as a free kick from David Thompson is converted by Paul Scharner for the Wigan equaliser.

**3.33** Arsenal 1 Wigan 2. No! Germany's number one goalkeeper is uncharacteristically beaten as Jens Lehmann allows a freakish 35-yard free kick from Thompson to catch him out of position.

**3.35** Arsenal 2 Wigan 2. Thierry. Enough said. Also West Ham 1 Tottenham 1. Jermaine Defoe shoots Spurs back into pole position for the Champions League place.

**4.10** Teddy Sheringham misses a penalty for West Ham as Arsenal fans mutter dark imprecations about his former allegiances.

**4.16** Arsenal 3 Wigan 2. A wayward back pass marches into the path of Henry. It is buried.

**4.36** Arsenal 4 Wigan 2. The last Arsenal goal is scored at Highbury, the 4,038th, a saga in itself, part farce, part tour de force. When Andreas Johansson is brought on as substitute by Wigan's manager Paul Jewell, his first job is to mark Freddie Ljungberg at a free kick. He does. A little too earnestly. Uriah Rennie, the referee, sends him off again. He hasn't touched the ball. From the resultant penalty, Henry strides up and calmly completes his hat-trick. Then he falls to his knees and kisses the turf in front of the North Bank, a loving gesture and a devastating one to those who believe it will be his last act for Arsenal. Many, many people, perhaps even Henry himself, think he is destined for

Barcelona.

**4.40** West Ham 2 Spurs 1. One more twist for luck. As Bergkamp enters the field for Arsenal in the Premiership one last time, Yossi Benayoun, West Ham's mesmeric Israeli, scores a winner which allows Arsenal to finish the season two points above Tottenham Hotspur and return to the Champions League. Dennis and his unseen friend are cheered above and beyond the rafters. It is a wonderful collusion of circumstances.

Fate, everyone said. It was fate. Arsène Wenger reinforced the view. "We had to deal with nerves. But today I had a feeling of fate. I saw what was happening with Spurs on TV, but we just had to play and win. We have achieved what we wanted in a fantastic manner." He admitted he was going to steal away a square of Highbury turf "and put it in my garden" but his principal feeling was pride and relief that on the day his team had been worthy of the occasion. "For the history of the Club and the history of this building, I'm pleased. We would have felt guilty for years if we had walked out having failed." Of the man who made failure impossible, Henry, he could not speak too highly. "Today, he's the best striker in the world. To be captain this year has given him another dimension. He has grown in stature and I hope this season will not be his last." Echoing the fervently held sentiment, the crowd sang "Thierry Henry, Four More Years" resoundingly as he received the season's Golden Boot award as the most prolific striker.

The day belonged to one man and everyone, simultaneously. Everyone from the tea ladies in tears in the cocktail lounge to the ghosts of the players who had gone long before. The team that began it all in their button-up maroon jerseys and immaculate hair partings, to the team that were ending it with their multi-million pound lifestyles and predominantly foreign passports. Nothing in common except one thing. A place that had seen it all.

Highbury, the link throughout Arsenal's mixed history. The first superstar, Charlie Buchan, who thought smoking a pipe was "good for your lungs". The grand opening of the glamorous East Stand – "a building of wonder and unparalleled in football" as it was described in the official Arsenal programme. The famous "Battle of Highbury" when no less than seven Arsenal players were called up to represent England against the Italian football team in 1934. The bombing by the Luftwaffe during World War II which destroyed the Laundry End and paved the way for its reincarnation as the famous North Bank. The Busby Babes' last match in England before the Munich air crash. A wonder game that finished 4-5 and thrilled the Arsenal devotees, even in defeat. The Cassius Clay v Henry Cooper heavyweight world title fight in 1966 that created a night of unforgettable passion at Highbury with the boxing crowd chanting

"Cooper, Cooper" as though he were their team. And just like their team of the time, he lost, on this occasion not to a goal but a right-hand jab in round six.

The arrival of local boy Charlie George and the Fairs Cup-winning night which reignited the Arsenal quest for success. Goalkeeper Bob Wilson's save at the feet of George Best when John Radford scored a hat-trick and Arsenal ran out 4-0 winners against Manchester United. The Double of 1970/1971. The FA Cup runs in the 1970s, showcasing the divine, blood-twisting talents of Liam Brady (to borrow a line from the admirers of Best). The sardine-packed afternoons on the North Bank when surges could take you for miles, songs could make you smile so terrible were the lyrics, and scuffles – or worse – sent you flying for cover. The nicknames like "Bonnie Prince Charlie" (Nicholas) and "Tin Tin" Perry Groves. The coming again of Arsenal success under the ramrod governance of Graham. The career of David "Rocky" Rocastle that was to end so tragically with his death from cancer at the age of 33 after 275 games and 34 goals for Arsenal.

The advent of the Wenger era, which changed Highbury almost overnight from a flat-pack factory to a theatre of dreams, culminating in this game against Wigan Athletic and its emotional aftermath. As the Arsenal Legends paraded round the pitch, a final lap of honour with affection their only trophy on display, it was a chance to say goodbye. And thanks. To Ian Allinson, 1983-1987, all the way to Willie Young, the man who put the double entendre into the North Bank's favourite songs. Midway through the proceedings that somehow married sorrow to celebration, the stadium fell quiet for a period of reflection. You could tell from far-away eyes and clenched jaw lines that many, many people in the crowd were saying goodbye to some of the best times and the dearest people of their lives.

I could see Dad now, carefully parking his car on a precarious corner just west of St Thomas's Road. Tapping his pockets, making sure he was in full possession of his season ticket (upper tier, West Stand), his flask of coffee and newspaper to read in the stand. We would stroll down, aptly, Ambler Road, tossing up the merits of Eddie Kelly over Graham, me longing for Charlie to be named in the team, Dad far less concerned with his long-haired sex-appeal than his application of boot to ball.

Then we would part. Dad striding purposefully towards his comfortable seat and chats with strangers who became friends over the years, while I would take my mass of scarves, thin as ribbons, and fetch up at my usual barrier in the North Bank. Half-way up, right behind the goal.

That was exactly the vantage point from which I saw Charlie's goal, the one against Newcastle very late on in the Double season of 1970/1971 that kept



Arsenal's hopes alive as they chased Leeds United. The joy. The relief.

I always met Dad by a church after the game. He was there first. I couldn't bear to leave before the end. I'd see his face over the bobbing heads of the crowd, invariably smiling. He took defeats much more stoically than I did. We'd drive home listening to Sports Report on Radio Two, raging against the match report if the commentator dared call Arsenal boring. It didn't matter that he might be right. Love is blind.

Any number of people were in tears that afternoon we came to say goodbye to Highbury. It made you remember not just players you had watched and teams you had worshipped, but the people who opened the door to the whole mysterious business in the first place. Dad wasn't waiting by the church any more. Nor were many, many others. The thousands dwindled into hundreds and then down again to tens. Sporadic little groups or single souls, paying their last respects. We were in good company. Bergkamp sat on, saying nothing, just signing the odd autograph when a fan straggled up to his box in the Clock End for one last souvenir. Was he reliving the goals he scored or the games he inspired with injections of majestic skill? His blue eyes revealed nothing. They just gazed steadily into the ether. It was touching that someone so exalted in the Highbury story was also so affected by the closure of the place. Not the Ice Man now.

"It's hard to leave," someone said to him. "Yes," he said. And that was the simple truth.

# **An art deco jewel**

David Miller describes more than 50 years of personal memories watching and covering games at Highbury

As I made my way towards the Arsenal Stadium – as it was correctly called – for the closing match against Wigan Athletic, a dozen or more memories crowded my mind. For me, the day did not carry the same emotions as for the hundreds jammed on the Piccadilly Line to what once was Gillespie Road (before Herbert Chapman artfully persuaded the London Electric Railway Company to change the name to Arsenal all those years ago). The regulars, bursting with pride and excitement and almost uniformly attired in red – the affiliated dress code having become almost mandatory these days – truly bore a sense of carnival. Their enthusiasm would grow in decibels once they entered the stadium, where everyone within 30 seats' range, whether or not they knew each other, was a friend, indeed almost a relation. Such is the bond that grows between supporters, to a degree which, in England, exceeds that in almost any other footballing country, and I have been to a hundred more. Indeed, sitting among these party-goers, I felt almost a stranger, yet my own connection with the Club, with the stadium, and with some of the personnel stretched back over 50 years, before the time that I became a journalist in 1956.

My first association, by proxy as it were, had come when I was 15. On first arriving at my junior school, aged seven, and being a country boy who knew nothing of professional football – it was the first time I had even encountered the lines that mark the field, and found this something of a drama in itself, the formalisation of a battleground – I was unfamiliar as yet with names of our great clubs. So when, during break, boys would start chanting "Up the Arsenal", such cries were a complete mystery. Within a few years, of course, tuning into radio commentaries on the Cup Final by the mellifluous Raymond Glendenning, the history and great traditions of our English game had begun to seep into my soul. And when I attended a summer coaching course for schoolboys at Ealing in West London in 1950, I hurt my ankle and was studiously cared for by a man in a white coat who seemed to have stepped straight from an antiseptic hospital ward but turned out to be none other than Bertie Mee, Arsenal's physiotherapist, I was mightily impressed. I felt I was now properly connected to the real game.

Two years on, and I actually saw the team in action – and at Wembley! My school had received two tickets for the Cup Final through the offices of Surrey County FA, and there I was on the terraces, with my ticket, priced three shillings

and sixpence (17\_ new pence) and my rogue programme – a single scruffy sheet hawked by some opportunist trader and not even containing the correct names – marvelling at the spectacle of the national stage. Arsenal's arrival from the tunnel with Newcastle United onto the velvet turf had seemed like the approach of Roman gladiators, and from thereon I was hooked, if not specifically to Arsenal itself, by the infinite variations and dramas of this beautiful game, which my own school, Charterhouse, had helped formally to establish almost a hundred years before. I had read about the history, but here was the reality, and watching the ageing Joe Mercer lead the heroic but vain battle by 10 men – the unfortunate Walley Barnes, Wales captain and right-back, having gone off injured in his attempt to stifle that jack-in-the-box Bobby Mitchell – was a vision I would never forget.

It was a privilege and an education a few years later to get to know Mercer, and his engaging wife Norah, intimately during the spell he spent as coach to amateur side Pegasus, with whom I was playing, before he moved off into senior management. Besides the benefit of his knowledge and experience, he imparted to us that sense of honour and dignity in conduct on the field, which had distinguished his heroic performance at Wembley, and would condition so much of my own thinking as a writer throughout the next 50 years. That FA Cup final defeat to Newcastle caused an event-charged emotion, the expectation of which in 2006 was now drawing the thousands to Highbury for the last time: a loyal affection to what they already knew, the hope of thrills yet to be revealed.

Another year on, in 1953, I had been at Highbury for the first time, discovering this art deco jewel, hidden among a forest of North London side-streets around 50 corners, and suddenly appearing like the White Cliffs of Dover on a foggy crossing of the Channel. By now I knew Wembley, but this was something different. This was like going to the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket, the grandeur of the stage, the smell of history and drama preceding a play, though in football we never know the plot in advance. Therein lies the game's fascination. On this occasion in 2006, what lay in wait for us from Thierry Henry and his colleagues? Would they seal the day in a manner befitting all that had gone before at this 93-year-old monument? What had drawn me and my father in 1953 had been a semi-final in the FA Amateur Cup, still a notable tournament in those days, between Pegasus, the combined club of Oxford and Cambridge, and Southall of the Athenian League. There was an attendance of 30,000 to witness a memorable 1-1 draw, Pegasus going on to win the replay at Craven Cottage and then record the Cup's highest-ever victory in the final against Harwich. The visit had given further substance to my recognition of Arsenal as a veritable institution. In conjunction with this had been the experience, the same season, of

playing against Peter Hill-Wood in our school fixture against Eton, an able player and distinguished cricketer who one day would succeed his grandfather and father as Club chairman.

It would have been hard to imagine, in 2006, a crowd more abundant in its mood of generosity. Wigan, new arrivals this season in the top flight who had performed beyond expectation, were welcome guests. None wished them any ill-will, but on an afternoon when an extended rivalry with Tottenham Hotspur was still on the boil – over the need to ensure fourth place in the Premiership and precious qualification for next year's Champions League – goodwill would not extend to allowing the visitors the points. Yet some nasty surprises were initially in store for Arsenal. Although Robert Pires smartly gave Arsenal the lead in the ninth minute, an equaliser by Paul Scharner less than a minute later, as the defence froze on a free kick by David Thompson, had Arsenal followers sweating in their souvenir T-shirts. Worse was to follow on the half-hour when, from another free kick, Thompson scored direct, Lehmann, in goal, being left utterly bemused behind a defence that remained static once again. Was history delivering Arsenal a final snub at Highbury?

The old stadium surely deserved better than this. The magnificent new West and East Stands had arisen, through Chapman's inspiration, in 1932 and 1936 respectively; the West opened by the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, prior to a match against Chelsea and shortly before humble Gillespie Road acquired its new status. It was here, in 1951, that one of the early floodlit matches had been staged in the professional game in a friendly against Hapoel from Tel Aviv. It was here, too, that the first under-pitch heating was installed in 1964. And it had been here, almost 30 years earlier, that the first televising of a match had taken place.

With its Bank of England-style main doors, approached up a small flight of steps in Avenell Road and benignly guarded by two smiling commissionaires, Highbury had always possessed an aura that was almost regal. Against Wigan, the contemporary team were playing for not merely their own reputations and prospects for the following season, but for the reputation of an institution that was truly part of England's social fabric. Football stadiums in England carry a relationship with the local community that is far more affectionate than anything you will find in Germany, Italy or Spain. It is that sense of social relationship which had helped attract many of Arsène Wenger's foreign players to Highbury. English stadiums have an affinity with local people that is no different from that of their pub, their church or, with those surviving from grander Victorian days, their railway station. At Highbury, as much or more than at any football ground, there has been a particular harmony between spectators and players – though I

would be foolish to suppose that such powerful affections did not likewise exist at St. James' Park, Old Trafford and elsewhere, even White Hart Lane! As Charlie George, a Highbury-born boy who graduated from the terraces to stardom on the field, reflected in the countdown to this final day: "Just walking through the front door and seeing the bust of Herbert Chapman in front of you was special to someone like me, who was brought up in North London and knew the history of the Club and what it meant to the people of my area. I remember the first time that I experienced all that. 'This is a proper football club', I said to myself."

Thierry Henry, born in even more humble circumstances in France, had been equally moved on his arrival in North London. On the wall preserved for players to inscribe their particular memory of playing for Arsenal, Henry wrote: "I will miss Highbury so much, it has been more than enjoyable to play and score goals here! It was just a special place for me."

In the throbbing intensity of the final encounter with Wigan, it was now calling for something special indeed. As I sat there observing – as a working journalist I was less emotional than the heaving crowd, my passion neutralised by my need for objectivity – my mind wandered back to my first visits to report on Arsenal in a professional capacity. That was in December 1958, when Arsenal were enduring what became a 17-year period without a trophy, and the team, managed by George Swindin, was in transparent decline. I was there to see them lose 2-1 to Preston North End, the last of three successive home defeats, following those against Blackpool and Aston Villa. Tommy Docherty was providing bravado in midfield, but if the crash-bang tactics of Vic Groves and Jackie Henderson up front did not work, Arsenal were stymied. By then the inimitable Jimmy Logie and Joe Mercer were long gone, and although the granite Jack Kelsey was there in goal, Arsenal lacked real authority. An amiable Jimmy Bloomfield was industrious in midfield, but Arsenal at that time lacked the quality now possessed in spades by Wenger's men, and defined by one word. Class. Days later I was there again to see them stop the rot with the only goal, by Bloomfield, against Luton Town, who would be losing Cup Finalists against Nottingham Forest at the end of the season.

Occasionally in those days at Highbury during the barren years, there was class on view, though too often it came from other teams' players. I well remember the staging of the fixture which used to precede the FA Cup Final, that of England v Young England. In 1960, these were the teams: England – Springett (Sheffield Wednesday); Armfield (Blackpool), Wilson (Huddersfield Town); Robson (West Bromwich), Swan, Kay (Sheffield Wednesday); Brabrook (Chelsea); Haynes (Fulham); Baker (Hibernian); Greaves (Spurs), Charlton

(Manchester United). Young England – Macedo (Fulham); Angus (Burnley), Allen (Stoke); Setters (Manchester United), Labone (Everton), Miller (Burnley); Paine (Southampton); Eastham (Newcastle), Pointer (Burnley), Fantham (Sheffield Wednesday), Holliday (Middlesbrough). It was going to need the touch of a Haynes, Baker, Greaves or Charlton to do something for Arsenal in their present predicament in 2006, and in Henry they had a man possessing elements of all four. Within a minute of Thompson having shot Wigan into the lead, and with his team intent on concluding their marvellous season in a triumphal manner, Henry whipped through Wigan's defence to make it 2-2 at half-time. Emotion was reaching the point of hysteria. While it can be said that there is nothing new in the game, one aspect that has changed in my time is a wish among spectators to believe that they are part of the act, that their presence, the noise they generate, is somehow instrumental in the fortunes of their team. I find it a strange presumption, as though a theatre audience suddenly supposed they had become part of the play. It is a move that has been encouraged by Nick Hornby, author of the autobiographical best-seller *Fever Pitch*, who's been an addicted Arsenal supporter throughout his life. Undue significance, in my opinion, was given to his work, because it can be both a blessing and a misfortune when the fluctuating achievements of a football team directly affect the state of mental well-being and social equilibrium of someone so devoted to the game.

Be that as it may, Thierry Henry was now in no mood to allow the Arsenal faithful to continue to suffer. On the hour he thrust Arsenal back into the lead. Men around me shouted themselves to the colour of their shirts, and women began to conduct themselves in an extravagant way that their grandmothers would have found quite extraordinary. Cheers rose to screaming pitch, and to raise the crescendo still further, Henry made it 4-2 from the penalty spot, when the unfortunate Andreas Johansson, introduced by Wigan to improve the attack, fouled Freddie Ljungberg at a free-kick and was sent off without having touched the ball. In near-pantomime style, he was cheered ironically from the field almost as though he had scored the goal himself.

And so to the final whistle. Arsenal had their Champions League spot, at the end of yet another afternoon of momentous rivalry with their neighbours down the road. Such rivalry is part of the life-blood of the game, and it is sad when the emotion generated transposes into hate, as too often it can do. We had seen one or two such moments a week or two earlier when Tottenham Hotspur were the visitors in a controversial draw, but now all was laughter and light. "There's only one Arsène Wenger," chanted the crowd. Henry made the perfect gesture of going to congratulate the Wigan section of the crowd. The man who had

surpassed the goal-scoring records of both the legendary Cliff Bastin and the iconic Ian Wright, with his hat-trick was now hero to everyone. "He's certainly today the best in the world," Wenger would venture. "Victory has taken the pressure off us [for the forthcoming Champions League Final against Barcelona]. After the draw with Spurs, I had felt the situation was not in our hands any more."

As the crowd intoxicated itself in celebration, and applauded a parade around the pitch of famous names, past and present, the flags of The Arsenal flew high: a literal stone's throw from where its future would now be conducted, visibly glinting against a spring sky.



# **Memories flood back**

**Alan Smith, the former North Bank hero turned writer, on an emotional final visit to his old stamping ground**

An unforgettable day began quietly enough for the long list of ex-players accepting Arsenal's invitation to take part in the Highbury Farewell. Asked to meet at Emirates Stadium on the morning of May 7 2006, a succession of faces – some instantly recognisable, some vaguely familiar – spilled out of their cars and onto a ramp leading up to the future. There she stood towering above us: a fearless citadel carved from steel and glass overlooking north London like a modern Parthenon. Craning their necks, the visitors stared skywards, most getting their first close-up of Highbury's much-vaunted successor.

From Alf Fields to Frank McLintock, John Radford to Graham Rix, Wilf Dixon to Malcolm Macdonald – this was Arsenal through the ages, a compendium of characters with one thing in common. They had all, at one time or another, worn the famous red and white. Some came further than others. Bob McNab, for instance, Arsenal's dependable left-back from the 1971 Double-winning side, flew across from his home in America to attend this special day. In all, 75 old boys turned up to pay their respects. And on that bright Sunday morning most were trying to get to grips with the fact that the space-age edifice now standing before them was soon to become Arsenal's new home.

Yet with a couple of months still remaining before the gates opened up for real, the new pad wasn't quite ready. Like a lady caught short by the early arrival of some posh dinner guests, she looked a bit flustered minus her make-up as an inquisitive crew stepped over the threshold. Inside the arena, only half the red seats had been bolted into place, to leave great swathes of concrete dominating the scene. As for the playing surface, the only bit of green came from a sparse spread of artificial fibres that would eventually add resilience to the natural grass. Just above us, the executive suites hadn't yet evolved beyond the timber and sawdust stage as several men in hard hats and luminous jackets stood on the edge of this rare get-together, some taking the chance to grab a few autographs.

Walking down the steps breathing it all in, I wondered what this place would look like full, teeming with 60,000 souls cheering on their team. Not one of those among us could fail to be impressed. The only downside, in truth, was that it had come far too late for us to play a part. All that said, any tributes going on this historic day didn't really belong in this particular corner of Islington. Such a spectacular setting would enjoy fame soon enough without laying down garlands

before it was even complete. No, this wasn't the time to be hanging about Emirates Stadium, not when her mother was facing an emotional retirement.

So after a quick gander, us old boys were ushered on to coaches bound for Highbury. After all, there was a game on you know. The visit of Wigan Athletic, as the record books show, represented the last match ever to take place down the bottom of Avenell Road. The clock had been ticking for quite some time and now only a few hours remained before the digits read zero, before an explosion of fireworks brought the house down.

It was close to midday – more than three hours before kick-off – when we stepped off that bus outside the West Stand. Even then, hundreds of supporters were already milling about only too aware they would never get this chance again. Neither would we. Led through the bowels of that antiquated stand – treading darkened passages we had rarely had cause to use before – our convoy emerged at the corner of the Clock End, the stand where the pre-match hospitality was all set to begin.

Firstly, though, we had to get in – not an easy task if you weren't on the list. Security had never been so tight as it was on that day, the day when the world seemed to revolve around London N5. As we queued in line, waiting to be issued with precious yellow wristbands that guaranteed entry, something happened that neatly summed up the situation; nothing too dramatic, but meaningful all the same. Arriving with his family, there was Theo Walcott, shining with angelic innocence, side-stepping the formalities to take his place upstairs. Talk about a timely symbol of young crossing paths with old. Theo was the future, a 17-year-old starlet hoping to grace Emirates Stadium for many years to come. Us lot, on the other hand, could only look back, to halcyon days now consigned to memory.

Hence the reminiscing once everyone gathered inside the huge marquee that had been specially erected inside the gym. And as soon as you walked through the door, it was obvious that the Club had invested a great deal of time and effort in the finer details. From the redcurrantcoloured cocktails handed out on arrival to the silver models of Highbury presented to every guest, the attention to detail bore a true touch of class. That's what helped make the atmosphere that extra bit special as the various generations sought each other out. As for my own era, there were one or two lads I hadn't seen in years. Anders Limpar, for instance, had come across from Sweden with his wife and two children. As roommates for a couple of seasons, we had been pretty close, then all of a sudden, as happens in football, that bond gets broken by a transfer; in this case, Anders's move to Everton.

Of the others, David Hillier was now a fireman in the West Country while

Andy Linighan had his own plumbing business in Hertfordshire. Perry Groves, on the other hand, was tied up with a company that makes spongy tarmac surfaces for playgrounds. Amazing, really, where life can take you after football.

In some ways, however, meeting old mates like this, though enjoyable, can also leave you feeling slightly morose seeing as it's never quite the same on the outside of the bubble. Back in the days of living life as a footballer, it was a cosseted existence – carefree as well, to a certain extent – full of banter and in-jokes, an atmosphere that insulates you from the real world. When all that comes to an end it is bound to have an effect. Inevitably, personalities change with the passing of time. Once the boots are hung up you have to grow up quickly. Gone are the days when you can act like little kids in an environment where everything is laid on a plate. As a result, people aren't always quite the same as you remember them – and the chances are they think the same about you.

Even so, these kinds of reunions are always great fun. You can revert to type, slip back into footballer mode and hark back to the days when the recurring theme was laughter, and plenty of it.

Sat around a table, then, in that marquee, we recreated the mood with one or two choice memories. Like the time Grovesy fell off a stretcher whilst being carried round the Highbury track, like the time some of us got caught having a crafty pint the day before a dead rubber at Norwich. Conversation lurched from one episode to the next between a group of people sharing a common bond. Steve Bould, Lee Dixon, Michael Thomas, Paul Davis, Ian Wright, Jimmy Carter, John Lukic, Dave Seaman, Martin Keown – what a great turnout it was from my age group.

As if to accentuate the point, our old manager strolled over to say his hellos. Eerily, it was like nothing had changed. Everyone calmed down, tried to be sensible, when George Graham asked his old charges if they were alright. 'Yes boss', we chorused, as if the clock had been turned back a good 15 years. Football is funny like that. A deep-lying respect means the gaffer usually keeps his moniker no matter how many years have passed in between. But this time, of course, George wasn't in charge. As lunch came to a close, another man who had been a heavy influence on some of those present was gearing up for work.

At that very moment, Arsène Wenger was preparing his players underneath the East Stand for the very last time. He had to get it right too.

For amongst all the hoo-ha of Highbury's last stand, a place in the Champions League was still very much at stake. Time to find our seats, then, in the West Stand lower tier down by the Clock End corner flag. Surveying the scene from this unfamiliar position, I remember thinking that Highbury had never looked so beautiful.

Sat in the vicinity of some of their old heroes, the fans were in full party mood as the match got under way, passing forward everything from programmes, books and shirts to tiny scraps of paper for a quick signature. At the same time, they kept us informed of events at Upton Park where Tottenham Hotspur of all teams had to match Arsenal's result to pip their old foes to a Champions League spot. 'Spurs are one down!', 'Defoe's equalised!' The shouts kept on coming as Wigan, meanwhile, did their very best to spoil Highbury's day. When Spurs old boy Teddy Sheringham went on to miss a penalty for West Ham United, the conspiracy theorists among us had an absolute field day. Earlier on, rumours had circulated that the game across London was going to be postponed due to an outbreak of food poisoning in the Spurs camp. This gossip only ladled extra tension on an extraordinary day, one lent extra intrigue when Thierry Henry got on all fours to kiss the Highbury turf after grabbing his hat-trick from the penalty spot. 'What do you think that means?' I asked Lee Dixon, sat in the row in front. 'Is he saying goodbye to Arsenal or just to this place?' A few days later, everyone found out. Henry was staying after all, despite Barcelona's ardour, having scored the last goal that would ever be seen in these parts.

So with a Champions League place in the bag after a stirring 4-2 win, everyone could properly enjoy what remained of the last-day celebrations. That included the old pros who, shortly after the final whistle, were escorted down to the gap between the North Bank and West Stand where the 'Parade of Legends' was due to begin.

Standing there, conscious that I should remember this moment for the rest of my days, I scanned the distinguished gathering, mentally trying to put a name to each and every face. It wasn't easy. Some were in their seventies, servants of the Club long before I was born. As we waited to walk out, supporters who had been killing time in the walkway underneath the North Bank took the chance to come across for a bit of boisterous backslapping, holding up mobile phones for a quick photograph. Hundreds of others hung over the side of the stand to shout down their hellos. It was actually spine-tingling stuff. The day was building to a climax, and everyone inside that stadium could feel the buzz. So out we went for the parade in alphabetical order, each player accompanied by a Junior Gunner who held a placard inscribed with their name and years of service.

Now I have never been the emotional sort when it comes to football. Family matters are different, they get me going in a trice, but as for shedding tears after, say, Anfield in 1989 or Copenhagen in 1994 – no, I didn't come close. This affair, on the other hand, tested my mettle. When it came to waving to the North Bank before heading off to the podium with the rest of the lads, I had to settle

myself, take a deep breath, as I paused for a moment on the edge of the penalty area. Staring up at that great mass of people, it was impossible not to think of all the good times, of the goals I had scored on this special strip of grass, of the hard work put in year after year.

The rebuilt North Bank, of course, looked totally different now from the terraced version that could hold nigh on 20,000 fans. Yet those old concrete steps weren't just used by the punters. They doubled up as a coach's training tool. Every Tuesday when there wasn't a midweek game, we'd have a 'physical' at Highbury that included races up the aisles of this famous terrace, the winner decided by who crashed first against the corrugated iron at the top.

Memories like that don't fade away. My first goal for Arsenal, in fact, was struck not far away from the spot where I was standing now – a tentative toe poke against Portsmouth, the first in a hat-trick, that bobbed through the goalkeeper's legs before creeping over the line. Standing there in my civvies 19 years on, I thought back to that instant, and several more besides. That's when something welled up inside without prior warning. Until that moment, I suppose I hadn't truly realised just how much Highbury meant.

That's why we stayed on till the end, my family and I, wringing every last drop from a wonderful day. When the time came to leave, we retraced our steps – through the West Stand and out to Highbury Hill where a coach was duly waiting to take us back to Emirates Stadium. Back to the future, you might say, where the day had begun. As for the past, it couldn't have asked for a better send-off.

2.

# **New horizons**

The first action at Emirates Stadium was the testimonial match for Dennis Bergkamp, while Aston Villa were the first Premiership visitors



**Arsenal 2 Ajax 1**  
July 22, 2006

**Dennis, thank you...**

**A huge crowd decked out in red, white and orange T-shirts pack Emirates Stadium and pay tribute to one of Arsenal's greatest**

He was possibly the player who started the change, the man who did the most to make it all possible. So it was fitting that the first game played at the magnificent Emirates Stadium, on July 22, 2006, was in honour of Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal's original Dutch master.

Not since the outrageous skills of Alex James, George Eastham and Liam Brady had Arsenal supporters seen a player of such sheer inspirational ability that made every one of the 423 games Bergkamp played – and 120 goals he scored – for the Club worth paying to watch. So it was fitting that 54,000 made their first trip to Arsenal's new ground to pay tribute and say farewell to a player who ranks alongside any other in the Club's history. Who else but Bergkamp could get Ian Wright, David Seaman, Thierry Henry and Patrick Vieira on to the same pitch as Marco van Basten and Johan Cruyff?

Bergkamp was overwhelmed by the love and support from supporters, friends and family alike when Ajax Amsterdam came to open Emirates Stadium for his testimonial. There were ovations for Wrighty and co, Vieira and Henry interrupted their holidays to fly back and play, but they were all eclipsed by the ovation for Dennis and his fellow countrymen Johan Cruyff and Marco van Basten, who were second-half substitutes when Bergkamp's Arsenal Dream XI took on and beat a side comprising his former Ajax team-mates.

"It was difficult not to get emotional out there," Bergkamp admitted. "I have a great family, but it feels like it was one big family with those players and those fans. The day was something for all of us. It is those people who truly love football and, apart from being there for me, they love the game, too, so every opportunity they get they want to show that. We asked them and they were ready to come over and be here. I showed them a lot of respect down the years and this is how they have paid it back."

Arsène Wenger was the architect behind re-establishing Arsenal as one of the world's greatest clubs going into the 21st century, but he knows that it would not have been all possible without Bergkamp at his peak. Speaking on the day, members of the Arsenal family past and present came to pay their respects to Bergkamp on his final game before retirement, Wenger said: "I was very lucky to find Dennis already in the squad when I arrived at Arsenal. You do not find a player like that everywhere you go. It was a blessing, a gift when I arrived."

Bergkamp joined Arsenal from Inter Milan and went on to win 10 major honours under Wenger. Early in Wenger's first Double-winning season of 1997/1998 Bergkamp, a Professional Footballers' Association and Football Writers' Association award winner, took the first three places in September's Goal of the Month award. Similar skills were displayed in scoring 36 goals in 79 appearances for Holland, making him a Dutch footballing hero second to none. Yes, Arsenal had become a title-winning team and European force under George Graham, but Bergkamp took it on another level and inspired a whole new brand of football in London N5. That is why the testimonial was such a special day for a special man, one who thrived at the very top of a demanding sport until he was 37, by putting his family, privacy, health and profession ahead of fame and riches.

With the resplendent Emirates Stadium bathed in summer sunshine, Dennis was there with wife Henrita and their four children: Estelle, Mitchell, Yasmin and Saffron, all mascots for the day. But in a lovely moment, the match was kicked off by his father, Wim. "In November he was diagnosed with lung cancer," Bergkamp explained afterwards. "He said he hoped he could make it to my game. He has always taken me to training and he and my mum even came to every home game in England, so it was fantastic to finish it in the right way with them both here and it was only right for him to kick off."

Bergkamp did not score in the 2-1 win, leaving the honour of scoring the first Arsenal goals at the new home of football to Henry and Nwankwo Kanu. Then he embarked on an emotional lap of honour before being chaired into the centre circle by Vieira and Henry. But he will not be saying goodbye to Arsenal fans forever – the Bergkamps have a box in the new stadium. With Bergkamp back in the box, maybe the Arsenal fans will be able to look up for years to come and still sing 'We've got Dennis Bergkamp'.

**‘One of the game’s greats’**

## Tributes to Dennis Bergkamp

**Peter Hill-Wood:** "There are moments that define entire chapters in the wonderful story of Arsenal Football Club. David Danskin calling a meeting of his fellow munitions workers in 1886 to suggest forming a football club; Sir Henry Norris persuading the football league that Woolwich Arsenal should be allowed to move north to Islington; Herbert Chapman taking the reigns at Highbury; Jon Sammels scoring the Fairs Cup-winning goal against Anderlecht for our first trophy in 17 years. All these are hugely significant events in the Club's rich history. Alongside such moments I believe you can include June 20, 1995 when Dennis Bergkamp signed his first contract for the Club."

**Johan Cruyff:** "In 1986 [when Bergkamp played under Cruyff at Ajax] we decided to use a different approach towards Dennis. Let's put it this way, he had to become tougher as a player. At the age of 17 his development went so fast I became more and more interested in using him for our first team. His technique was great and the same goes for his game intelligence. Dennis was already by then the type of player whose feet could do what the mind wanted. What I remember from the night of his debut [a substitute appearance in a 3-1 Cup Winners' Cup win over the Swedish team, Malmö, in March 1987] is that Dennis had to go home immediately after the game because he had to attend school the next day at 8.15."

**Henrita Bergkamp (wife):** "I know how much the fans think of Dennis and they show a lot of respect to him. It's been great and the relationship he had with the fans has made our time here even more special. Now we have bought a box at Emirates Stadium so we will continue to watch the games and Dennis will be able to shout at all his former team-mates."

**Bruce Rioch:** "The thing I remember the most about Dennis is that he is such a gentleman. He is great company and never has a bad word to say about anybody. He wasn't just a great footballer, but a great person as well."

**Patrick Vieira:** "Dennis is undoubtedly one of the game's great players. I have been lucky to play with some brilliant players in my career and Dennis is definitely one of the best. If you are naming your all-time greatest football team, Dennis is in it."

**Wim Jonk:** "Our way of playing was never a matter of training, but a matter of instinct. For me he was the ideal partner."

**Thierry Henry:** "Dennis made passes that weren't only perfectly timed but didn't seem humanly possible. I hope in the future people will remember we had a great partnership together because I think it would be great to be remembered alongside a legend like Dennis."

**Guus Hiddink on Bergkamp's unforgettable goal in the World Cup quarter-final at USA 94:** "During those last minutes against Argentina, with the score at 1-1, he made the three perfect touches of the ball. Enough to put a brilliant winner in the back of the net. Another masterpiece that Dennis made look simple."

**Edwin van der Sar:** "On the day we [Ajax] had to play the UEFA Cup Final against Torino, Dennis got terrible flu. It was impossible for him to play. But after we won the cup we decided to go with the whole team in the players bus to his house. In the middle of the night we handed over our trophy in his bedroom!"

**Marco van Basten:** "Dennis's strength was that he had the intelligence to know when he had to act as a midfield player and when to be a striker. He had a perfect eye for these options."

**Ian Wright:** "Whatever Maradona could do with his left foot, I swear Dennis could do it with his right... The opportunity to play with Dennis Bergkamp was the highlight of my football career."

**Arsenal 1 Aston Villa 1**  
August 19, 2006



# **Emirates Stadium takes off**

New season, new surroundings. Sue Mott on settling into a new home round the corner from Highbury

It was exactly the same and entirely different. The scene was the same. Same burger vans, same scarf stalls, same supporters' club premises. Even the same strapping, eye-shielded horses keeping a stoic guard on the hordes and making a downward glance advisable as the supporters trudged through the narrow streets. Good for roses. Less so for trainers.

Same journey. Arsenal fans, now restored to red and white after the redcurrant experience of the farewell season, were still jostling on to the Tube to emerge into the daylight at Arsenal Underground station, now minus the mural. Same restaurants up the hill towards Highbury Corner, neatly packed with pontificating regulars enjoying pre-match fortification in the shape of wine, roast hake and guesswork. "4-1," someone always said, in the rosy throes of post-luncheon enthusiasm. Inevitably, a friend always disagreed, but, optimist or pessimist, you could always take your choice. Either way, they were the same conversations that Arsenal supporters have been having for years, decades, eons – shuttling between super-confidence and depression as personal tastes dictated. "That Denis Compton..." "That Ian Ure..." "That Perry Groves..." "That Baptista, have you seen the size of him?" Same pubs, same drinks, same anticipation, same scarves, same songs, same friends, same fears, same love.

Just not the same place any more. The wrecking ball had gone to work on Highbury. Arsenal had moved house and home – and to such a place of splendour and size that few people who understood the role of high finance in modern football, save a handful of hopeless sentimentalists, could have wished the move unmade. Emirates Stadium at Ashburton Grove had risen literally from rubble. To be more specific from the local waste and recycling dump in Hornsey Street, N7. It had been built on time, to its £390 million budget and to magnificent specifications: marble bars, red carpet floors and blow-you-away dryers in the lavatories. And, key point, it seated 60,432 fans as opposed to old Highbury capacity of no more than 38,500. That had been the catalytic equation. Arsenal had to move from their home of former glories, no matter how redolent of memories and the trickery of ancient feet. It had to be done. It was a modern, 21st-century response to an age-old problem: how to generate enough revenue.

So on the opening day of the 2006/2007 Premiership season, Saturday, August 19, against Aston Villa, everything was the same except suddenly, vastly,

different.

Yes, the fans arrived at Arsenal station. All the pre-match rituals could be scrupulously observed, but those who bent their steps to Highbury – muscle-memory and homage spurring them on – had a shock when they reached the front entrance to the Marble Halls. No longer did the uniformed commissionaire stand outside, holding a throng at bay as the fans patiently waited in anticipation of the Arsenal team bus. There was nobody there any more. The old glass doors at the top of the steps were padlocked and blanked out by hardboard. Now the realisation slammed home that Highbury as Arsenal's home was truly gone. Those same eyes peeled away again and looked ahead. Moved forward. It was simply a matter of evolution. Highbury was now an architectural form of Neanderthal Man (no slight intended towards any former centre-half). It had been glorious and supreme in its time, but now a different species of stadium was required to carry Arsenal to a new level: financially, aesthetically, competitively.

So having paid their last respects to the old place, the fans bent their steps west where the giant saucer rim of the new stadium roof was just visible on the horizon. Sight of the roof, with its rollercoasters of tubular steel and its weight load of 5,000 tonnes, guided the initiates to their new home. It could snow quite a bit without the roof buckling. The nearer they came, the more the vast edifice revealed its 15,000 square metres of glazing, 4,500 metres of hand railing, two cast-iron cannons and seven giant concrete letters at the mouth of the South Bank Bridge, spelling out 'ARSENAL'.

It was an awe-inspiring scene, almost double the number of Highbury's fans funnelling into a brand-new, space age, immaculate home. By the end of the season, attendances would total 1.1 million, all trudging up and down the 100 flights of stairs to find their new red seats, the first of which was ceremonially installed by the young Arsenal midfield player, Abou Diaby. Apart from the spanner-wielding Frenchman, up to 1,400 construction workers had contributed to its readiness. Just in time for Dennis Bergkamp's Testimonial on July 22, 2006. An Arsenal XI had beaten an Ajax XI 2-1 and the only downside of the occasion was the fact that the celebrational Dutch orange that Dennis inspired clashed horribly with the red seats.

But there was no such problem when Arsenal kicked off the season in earnest. Only green, red, white and blue were on display – green pitch, red tiers, white roof and a sky striped pale blue and white like an Argentine shirt. Picturesque. At least until the moment Olof Mellberg became the scorer of the first Premiership goal in the new stadium – for the opposition. The silence, but for the bouncing curve of Aston Villa supporters in the South East corner, soared

to the overhanging roof. This was not in the script. Arsène Wenger made one of his familiar appearances on the touchline. Among the things Arsenal fans had been told in the new official Club handbook (at £3, some seven million times cheaper than Ashley Cole who had just been sold to Chelsea) was that the energy rating of Emirates Stadium was equivalent to the simultaneous boiling of 6,300 electric kettles. Wenger's frustrations comprised about 200 electric kettles on his own.

It mattered so much that Arsenal, the team and their mood, transferred smoothly to their new home. No stone, or bathmat, had been left unturned. From the horseshoe-shaped dressing room, to the physio's room, to the hydro pool, to the warm-up area, the players' facilities were state-of-the-football-art. A long, long way from the opening day at Highbury in 1913 when the water was warmed by equipment borrowed from Army field kitchens because the building work was behind schedule. So Wenger was not happy. One-nil down and not best pleased that France had played Thierry Henry for the full 90 minutes of an international friendly in midweek. José Antonio Reyes was on the cusp of a move to Real Madrid, for which Arsenal would receive the compensation of Julio Baptista on loan. The Club was slightly unsettled, in more ways than one.

Surely Arsenal's existence at their new stadium would not begin with defeat? It was all very well having 900 toilets, 475 plasma screens, 196 x 2,000 watt light bulbs and two giant screens, but what was the point of a majestic new stadium if we were 1-0 down to Aston Villa?

Enter Gilberto. Rescuing the short history of the Club's new wonder-home, the Brazilian left his post as chief shock absorber in front of the back four to rattle in a late, narrow-angled equaliser beneath the Aston Villa cross bar. Thus the opening game of the season ended Arsenal 1 Aston Villa 1, and that was to become something of a pattern. The first eight Premiership games at Emirates Stadium produced either a 1-1 draw or a 3-0 victory. What was going on? Aston Villa, Middlesbrough, Everton and Newcastle United all managed to hold the home side to a draw while Sheffield United, Watford, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur were all soundly defeated.

Perhaps it was no surprise that Arsenal were struggling to find consistency. They were playing, in effect, on a neutral ground. This fabulous palace of a football stadium would take a little getting used to. Even Henry, who missed the last few games before Christmas 2006 with a string of niggling injuries combined under the label "sciatica", admitted to a nervous reaction in the new surroundings: "Without having a go at anyone, when we have a goal-line tap-in and it ends up in the keeper's hands, that's not the new stadium's fault. Players sometimes have off days. It's true the visual landmarks are different now. There

are some shots on goal which I scored with at Highbury that I haven't yet attempted at Emirates Stadium. With my back to the goal I'm not certain where I am yet. It will take us a while to get our bearings."

These misgivings were not necessarily shared by all the fans. Those who remembered the unlovely smell of open-topped toilets, finger-scorching plastic cups of tea and the trickle of rain down an upturned collar were transported to a world every bit as fantastical as Oz. And Wenger was the Wizard. This is a football stadium where you can be carried up to your seat via escalator. Where you sink into deep-pile red carpets along the corridors. Where chefs in full regalia carve joints of tender beef in front of your eyes while you sit at formally laid tables watching the meandering crowd through the floor-to-ceiling glazed windows.

Peter Storey, a defensive midfielder whose game was not entirely based on sophistication, would have been amazed. Less so Herbert Chapman, the greatest innovator of his day. He would have understood the financial imperative that put the contents of Highbury into packing cases and moved his football club round the corner. There was something to lose, perhaps, but the gains were unarguable.

For the regular fan, feelings were initially mixed. Jon Spurling, a life-long Arsenal fan and author of many books on the Club, including *Highbury, the Story of Arsenal in N5*, said: "Gone are the cramped views from the East and West lower tiers, the art deco feel, the sense of tradition, and the sheer closeness to the surrounding streets. Instead, there are unparalleled views of the game, and a grandiose feel to games which was never the case at Highbury, but it doesn't help matters that in order to reach Emirates Stadium via Finsbury Park and Arsenal Tube stations, you still have to walk past our old stomping ground. It's an unquestionably surreal experience.

"Until Arsenal defeated Liverpool in November 2006, I also questioned whether or not watching Arsenal would really seem the same again. Ashburton Grove doesn't have quite the same "get-at-ability" feel which Herbert Chapman realised Highbury had, and it felt rather like visiting Cardiff's Millennium Stadium every other week. But having got off the train at Finsbury Park Tube, strolled down St Thomas's Road (my favoured route to Highbury), popped into The Auld Triangle (my pre-match hostelry of choice in the Highbury days) and seeing Arsenal thrash one of their biggest rivals 3-0, I felt as if I was starting to move on."

Significantly, with Christmas came presents. First the team clambered out of the rut of 1-1 draws ... with a 2-2 draw against Portsmouth. Then the day before Christmas Eve the floodgates finally opened and the young Arsenal team that had been so profligate in front of goal finally scored in abundance, albeit with

three goals in the final five minutes, beating Blackburn Rovers 6-2. "We produced some football that was absolutely amazing to watch," said Wenger. "The team played tremendous football. We are never boring here – you can accuse me of a lot, but you can never accuse me of that."

The season turned out to be, ultimately, one of disappointment and frustration: so nearly and yet not quite. A disastrous period at the end of February and the start of March saw their hopes dashed in all four competitions. And in April their unbeaten record at Emirates Stadium was ended by West Ham United. Nevertheless, comfort off the pitch and beauty on it boded well for the future. Admittedly, it would take a while to lay the lovely ghost of Highbury. But if the memories could not be replaced, they could be augmented. The days of Highbury II, for better or for worse, had dawned.

## INTERVIEW

# **On tour with Raddy**



**Alan Smith joins John Radford, the durable striker who was a key member of the 1971 Double-winning side, as he leads a group of supporters on a guided tour of emirates Stadium**

John Radford played nearly 500 games for Arsenal, 149 goals commemorating his talent. As an obdurate centre-forward he was difficult to match – a born trier, certainly, who never stopped running but also a clever, unselfish tactician whose movement, vision and touch brought out the best in his strike partner, whether that happened to be Joe Baker, Colin Addison, George Graham, Brian Kidd or, most famously, perhaps, Ray Kennedy.

Inevitably, Radford is remembered the most for that axis with Kennedy, an industrious alliance that helped set the tone for a campaign climaxing in glory with the 1971 League and FA Cup Double. Unlike young Kennedy, though, ‘Raddy’ was already well established by the turn of the decade as part of a side that ended up clinching the Club’s first European trophy. On a throbbing night at Highbury in the second leg of the Fairs Cup Final, it was the striker’s header that nudged Arsenal in front on aggregate to break Anderlecht’s resistance. The following season, a tally of 21 goals only hints at the level of Radford’s valuable input.

In the end, these celebrated bullet points defined the player’s career. They serve as the main reason so many fans mark him down as a true Arsenal legend.

It is in that guise, actually, that Radford now hosts tours of Emirates Stadium. It is a chance to turn back the clock, to reminisce a little, in between describing Arsenal’s new home. His strong Yorkshire tones act as an evocative tool in giving supporters a sense of how the Club has evolved. The deadpan delivery is greeted with warmth, as a nostalgic reminder of how things used to be in the days when this doughty miner’s son enriched England’s playing fields with his earthy endeavour.

## **The Home Dressing Room**

Radford stands in the middle and tries to explain how things have changed. As an Arsenal apprentice at the start of the 1960s, certain rituals stood out, never to be forgotten. Like the tin baths, for instance, lined up at London Colney, waiting for the players to finish their training.

"We had to get in early to fill them up with nice hot water for the first team," Radford remembers. "Then the reserves would use 'em, then the metropolitan

side and then us, the youth team. It were the same water. By the time we got there, a film of mud covered the surface. You had to skim it off before getting in."

His attentive audience smiles fondly as one, only too aware of the stark contrast nearby. To our left, a brand new hydrotherapy pool gently bubbles away underneath a row of gleaming high-powered showers. Highbury's big bath, with its irregular chunks of carbolic soap, has now given way to sterilised perfection.

Lingering for a moment, Radford takes us back again to his heyday. It was the end of the 1960s and the great Manchester United side containing Bobby Charlton, George Best and Denis Law were in town at a time when Arsenal were going through a fairly rocky spell. Clearly worried by the prospect, Don Howe, Bertie Mee's number two, starts instructing Frank McLintock as to how he should handle Law.

"Don starts giving it the big wind-up to Frank before the game," Radford explains. "He says: 'I don't want Law getting a kick today, so here's what you do. The first chance you get to tackle him, kick him right up in the air. The next one, you kick him further up in the air and harder.' Frank turns round and says: 'Look Don, Denis is a bit of a fiery character. He ain't just going to accept this. He's liable to turn round and give me a right hook.' 'OK, not a problem,' Don says. 'Hit him back if you like.' 'But we're both going to get sent off that way,' Frank comes back. 'Don't worry,' Don says, 'They'll miss him more than we'll miss you!'"

When the chuckles die down it is time to move on.

## **The Press Conference Theatre**

Settled in the chair used by Arsène Wenger for post-match inquisitions, Radford reveals how, but for an insistent father, he would never have ventured down south in the first place.

As a budding 15-year-old from the mining town of Hemsworth, a working-class stronghold where Labour votes were 'weighed, not counted', Radford used to play for Bradford City's youth team after school. The Bantams, it seems, were suitably impressed. "I did actually sign for Bradford, but the very next morning there was a knock on the door and it was an Arsenal scout asking me to come down to London for trials," recalls Radford.

Cue his father's intervention with a firm word. To imitate the orders, Radford's accent grows thicker. "My dad said: 'Thou's not going to Bradford City until thou's been to Arsenal.' It were funny because I didn't think he knew

anything about Arsenal. He obviously did, though. Said I'd got to go and see them, that he'd keep those Bradford forms safe until I'd got back from my three-day trial."

When that initial audition went well, another trial followed, this time for a month, before young John signed as an apprentice professional. "I think somewhere up in my old house in Yorkshire there's still those old Bradford City forms," he says. "They could have changed my whole life."

He's not wrong there. For a start, he wouldn't have met his future wife, a Dutch girl called Engel, who crossed the youngster's path on his first trip with Arsenal, a pre-season tour to Switzerland and Holland. He elaborates on this story when we get together in private. For now, Raddy entertains his party with the unusual circumstances surrounding his wedding day.

"My wife wanted to get married some time around Christmas. After phoning round for dates, the only one possible was December 21, which was a Saturday. I said: 'Look, we've got a problem darling. We've got a game in the afternoon.' But in the end I said we'd do it. You can't let football interfere with your personal life, can you?"

Having got married at 10 o'clock, the groom dashed off to Highbury for a less romantic date – a 3 o'clock tussle with West Bromwich Albion. Radford will never forget the game. Nor, for that matter, the referee.

"It was that horrible little git Clive Thomas. Anyway, we're winning 1-0 and we get a corner. The ball comes in, I've jumped up and bosh – straight in the top corner. Thomas disallows it. Said Bobby Gould was offside standing right over on the by-line.

"I said: 'You can't disallow it! Bobby's miles away. How the bloody hell is he interfering with play? You know it's my wedding day, don't you?' 'Tough luck,' he says. 'I have disallowed it and it won't stand.'" At this point, I think, we could all feel the punchline coming. "But there was some good news," Radford smiles. "In the evening, I did score!"

## **The Directors' Box**

Radford looks down at the lush patch of green that hosts today's stars. He scans the sea of red seats, the endless line of executive boxes that circle the ground before casting a glance over the roof's undulating lines. Just over there, less than a mile away, an apprehensive teenager began his incredible journey.

"First of all, they put me in a little hotel in Finsbury Park," Radford remembers, thinking back to his start as an apprentice. "That made my

homesickness worse because you had nothing to do in the evenings. All the other lads were in digs in Southgate and around that way."

The view from the directors' box is superb. On matchdays, the pursuit of excellence down below keeps everyone captivated, the football is sublime when all goes to plan. Yet during quieter moments like this when there is nothing to distract the inquisitive observer, it is probably for the best that the sweeping stands hide the sad scene developing just across the way.

Bit by bit, Highbury was being carefully dismantled. As Radford said his piece, the North Bank and Clock End already well on the way. Watching from close quarters, Avenell Road was adjusting to a different sort of ambience – much different, certainly, from the one that existed when Radford first arrived.

"Actually, my first digs were in Avenell Road, with Jack and Val Hoy," he says. "Then I moved to Plimsoll Road, the next road along, with Mrs Butcher. Didn't have far to go in the morning. After that I had two digs in Bounds Green."

Yet it was from those first digs, located in the shadow of the Marble Halls, that Radford set off on his first Arsenal journey. It was time to expand on an earlier theme. The official tour over, we head for the comfy seats in the cavernous press room where my fellow centre-forward turns back the clock.

Packing for that tour of Switzerland and Holland, Radford shared a suitcase with fellow apprentice Tommy Baldwin, with whom he was sharing digs in London. The arrangement worked fine – they roomed together when abroad as well – until, that is, the tour reached its final leg in Amsterdam.

"We were all gathered in this huge hall together with the local families who had agreed to put us up," Radford remembers. "All the teams were in there. Must have been 700-800 people in total. Anyway, a guy gets on the microphone and starts telling us who's stopping with who. He gets to Tommy. 'Will Mr Baldwin please leave with Mr and Mrs So-and-So.' Tommy picks up the bag and he's gone! With all my bleedin' clothes! I had to go and find him in the morning. Anyway, I eventually get called out and go with this lad who takes me outside to get on his bike, one of those with a little motor on the back. So there was me, clinging on to him as we weaved in between the trams and the traffic of Amsterdam. When we get to his place – a flat above some shops – he introduces me to this girl. 'She looks alright,' I thought to myself. He must have read my mind because he says: 'Meet my girlfriend, Engel.' As it turns out, he were having me on. I soon find out that it were actually his sister."

Armed with the good news, the young Englishman abroad decides to chance his arm and asks the girl if she would like to go out for something to eat that evening. The invitation accepted, the pair head into town and after a bit of deliberating they eventually choose an Indonesian restaurant where neither could

make head or tail of the menu.

"We order this meal that was made up of lots of small dishes. I'm straight from Hemsworth, remember. All I've known is fish and chips or roast beef on a Sunday. Anyway, I take a mouthful and it blows my mouth off. I'm on fire."

Deciding to beat a hasty retreat, the couple end up in a nightclub. Unfortunately, it wasn't the sort Radford envisaged. "It were like the Folies Bergère in Paris, only with blokes! All of a sudden, they start peeling off their clothes!"

Worse was to come. "It's about 1 o'clock in the morning when in comes Billy Wright [the Arsenal manager] with six directors. 'Come on, drink up,' I say to Engel, 'we're going.' I try to sneak round the back, but as I pass their table a hand comes out. 'Where are you going son?' 'I'm going home, Mr Wright.' 'Good, see you in the morning.' That's it, I thought, I'm finished. I mean, I'm only 16."

Fortunately, Billy Wright's reputation as a kind and understanding soul came to the rescue. "The next day the only thing he said was: 'It's a good job you got up and left when you did'."

Not too long after that, Wright would have another word, only this time the message elicited a different kind of reaction. Radford had been knocking in the goals for the youth team and reserves when, in the course of his duties at Highbury, he was approached by the boss.

"I were actually on my hands and knees scrubbing the stairs that led up to the old gym above the first-team dressing room," he recalls. "Billy Wright came up and said 'John, I want you to go home and get some rest. You're playing tomorrow at West Ham.' It wasn't as if I was on the fringe of the first team. It just came straight out the blue. Joe Baker had been sent off in the FA Cup against Liverpool – he'd smashed Ron Yeats, great punch it were – and that was how I got in, when Joe was suspended."

A 1-1 draw at Upton Park on March 21, 1964 proved to be the youngster's one and only appearance that term. Fifteen more came the following season before Radford established himself during the 1965/1966 campaign. Under Bertie Mee's stewardship, he started to blossom, becoming a key part of a burgeoning side. Success didn't come quickly, mind. Arsenal had to suffer the indignity of losing two League Cup Finals on the trot before ending a long barren spell with that tumultuous Fairs Cup victory.

"That was probably the biggest night I had at Highbury," Radford says. "To be honest, it were so frantic that I can't even remember them presenting the cup. The first glance I got of it was when the crowd were carrying Frank [McLintock] around with it."

Unfortunately, one of the goalscorers that night was soon brought back down to earth. After a heavy night of celebration, Radford got up the next morning and dashed excitedly off to hospital to visit his wife, who had just given birth to their first child. "I take my medal round to show the wife and she's in tears. Ian has been rushed off to Great Ormond Street with bowel and intestine problems." It was a worrying condition, one that, on and off, would continue to preoccupy the Radfords for the next 16 years. In the end, in fact, the strain and worry it involved played a central part in Raddy leaving the place he joined as a boy. Travelling to and from hospital every day, worried sick about their son, something had to give in the couple's life.

"It were too much. My mind weren't on the job. I was knackered in the end." The onset of a few injuries certainly didn't help, and neither did a blazing row with then-manager Terry Neill. So after 14 years of service, after giving it his all, he walked out the door in December 1976, his place in Highbury folklore guaranteed. Fame, goals, glory – and a wife into the bargain: the memories began stacking up from his first day away, from the moment Radford senior sent his son south. Yes, all in all it had been quite a trip.

**3.**

# **The French revolution**

Under the guidance of Arsène Wenger, Arsenal have become a team both successful and beautiful to watch, with footballing artists such as Thierry Henry, Dennis Bergkamp and Patrick Vieira gracing the Club



# **Arsène's Arsenal**

Perceptions of Arsenal have changed dramatically since Arsène Wenger's arrival. Patrick Barclay examines his impact on the Club

The difference in philosophy between George Graham and Arsène Wenger as Arsenal managers is that, while Graham loved skill – and greatly enjoyed issuing reminders of how elegantly he had practised it throughout his playing days – he would do anything, or nearly anything, for a result. Wenger has contrived to combine the securing of results with an unbending insistence on style.

In this sense he deserves to go down in history as one of the most principled managers of all time. He came to a Club with a reputation for pragmatism and turned them into such a beautiful passing team that the Champions League Final of 2006, which pitted them against the relentlessly flowing Barcelona of Frank Rijkaard, was billed as the aesthete's dream. Some years earlier, Real Madrid had been regarded as the most artistic club side in the world. Bracketed, again, with Arsenal. As Wenger approached his 10th anniversary in charge, Thierry Henry paid tribute, saying: "When I am walking in London, or even abroad, people come up and say 'I'm not an Arsenal fan, but I love to see you play'. And that's because of Arsène."

Seldom, indeed, can there have been such a transformation of a club's image as Wenger has wrought at Arsenal since his arrival from Japan in the autumn of 1996, when the chants of 'Boring, boring Arsenal' were used by opposing crowds, and without a trace of the delicious irony in which Arsenal's own fans were to revel.

There was a notable American football coach, Vince Lombardi, whose manuals the British managers and coaches are still fond of reading. His most quoted saying is that 'Winning isn't everything – it's the only thing'. Wenger would never have agreed with him. Not on that point, at least. Yet he would surely have subscribed to another of Lombard's pearls: 'The greatest of all achievements is not in never falling, but in rising again after falling.' And without question Wenger would, if necessary, defend his squad with the vigour that Lombardi once displayed in telling a club owner who spoke of the players as mere hirelings: 'These aren't truck drivers, they're artists. Do you understand? Artists!' To Wenger, simply winning is not enough – it has to be done his way. And, if you were to look for a figure from football's past with whom to compare him, as good a choice as any would be the late Bill Nicholson; the fact that Nicholson was the revered manager of the most attractive team ever produced by

Arsenal's great rivals, Tottenham Hotspur, should be no disqualification.

They would have got on well, even though Nicholson, unlike Wenger, was not an especially eloquent man and relied on Danny Blanchflower, his Double-winning captain, to explain the philosophy behind that side of the early Sixties. "The great fallacy," Blanchflower said, "is that the game is first and last about winning. It's nothing of the kind. The game is about glory. It's about doing things in style, with a flourish, about going out and beating the other lot, not waiting for them to die of boredom."

Nicholson liked to win as much as the next man, as does Wenger, who can be a bad, even ungracious, loser. Yet the dour Yorkshireman shared the urbane Alsatian's philosophy to the extent that he scolded his players – after both the League match that secured the Championship of 1960/1961 and the FA Cup Final that followed – for having insufficiently entertained the spectators. Times change and it is difficult to imagine Wenger taking perfectionism that far – there would have been eyebrows raised, for instance, had he hurled teacups or kicked walls after the extremely lucky win over Manchester United in the 2005 FA Cup Final at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff – but the principle remains.

Interestingly enough, that FA Cup Final of 1961, in which Spurs beat Leicester City 2-0, would have been one of the first English matches Wenger saw on television. As a boy he would join the throng in the school hall of his home village, Duttelheim in Alsace near France's border with Germany, to watch the annual Wembley event on the community's only television set. In those days it had a uniquely international appeal (our First Division, the forerunner to the Premiership, was not shown live even in England in those days). In the spring of 1961, he was six months short of his 12th birthday; what, peering at that little black and white screen, he thought of the entertainment, no one can tell, but anyone lucky enough to have seen the first of these manifestations of the footballing arts must surely have rejoiced in the appearance of the second, with its heady blend of pace, delightful intricacy and lethal directness.

A few weeks before Nicholson's death in October 2004, he was honoured by Tottenham Hotspur at a function attended by most of the surviving members of his great team. At the time Arsenal were well into that famous Premiership season which ended with them as unbeaten champions and, although Nicholson was too frail to be pressed to talk in detail about them – "pretty good, aren't they?" was his typical understatement – Cliff Jones, his former winger, was only too happy to address the issue. "In my opinion the current Arsenal are definitely the best side of the past 40 years," he said. "And I think most people would agree with that. Except maybe Sir Alex Ferguson." Some of Ferguson's Manchester United sides had shown the panache that Nicholson craved, but Arsenal had

class all over the field, Jones said. They were a very special side and he could see in them the manager's insistence on a certain style. "Bill made sure we played with style: he even made us train with style," Jones said. Similarly, Wenger's teams are the product of drilled artistry; he has never countenanced the shaking of their belief through compromise.

The best example of this arose shortly after the Club had moved from Highbury to Emirates Stadium, when Arsenal cast aside the disappointment of an inauspicious start to the 2006/2007 season and achieved one of their most thrilling victories. It was at Old Trafford and it mattered so much to Wenger that afterwards he said it had been the most satisfying of all his triumphs over Sir Alex Ferguson's club. Given that Arsenal had won a title at Old Trafford, that was quite a statement, but the Frenchman said: "Because of the pressure we were under before the game, and the young players in the team, this was the most complete win." By pressure Wenger had meant the worry that Manchester United would take a lead of 13 points over them with the season hardly begun. Arsenal had drawn two games and lost the other in their first three matches; United had won four games out of four. Yet by the end of an enthralling afternoon the gap was a relatively manageable seven points and Arsenal, their campaign kick-started, were able to smile over the chants of 'Going down, going down' that had greeted their reappearance on the great Mancunian stage.

The story of the match is worth dwelling upon because, coming as it did just a couple of weeks before the 10th anniversary of Wenger's appointment in charge of Arsenal, it testified to his enduring mental strength and a defiant adherence to his footballing beliefs.

He arranged his team in 4-1-4-1 formation, which may have suggested a caution reminiscent of his tactics in that 2005 FA Cup Final which Arsenal so fortuitously won, but was, in fact, used as a framework for bold attack. Within 12 minutes the combination of Francesc Fabregas and Emmanuel Adebayor, which was to prove the home side's downfall, had earned a penalty, but Gilberto slipped as he took it and the ball went gently through to the United debutant goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak. But Gilberto composed himself and proceeded to give an outstanding performance in his customary holding midfield role. At least it would have stood out, but for the tireless efforts of Adebayor as the lone spearhead and, best of all, the brilliance of Fabregas as the general of a midfield packed with little technicians: Tomas Rosicky, Alexander Hleb and Freddie Ljungberg were the others. So much for balance. Skill, skill and more skill were Wenger's weapons that day and even a side containing Wayne Rooney, Paul Scholes and Cristiano Ronaldo could scarcely compete with wave after wave of shapely counter-attacks.

Chances, though, were missed and the injured Thierry Henry was conspicuous by his absence when Adebayor steered an inviting chance into the arms of an again-grateful Kuszczak with time running out. There were just five minutes left when the deadlock was broken. Ronaldo, who had been showing signs of over-confidence all afternoon, tried an injudicious turn and Fabregas stepped in. The Catalan, aged 19 yet demonstrating an ability to lead on the field that was reminiscent of the departed Patrick Vieira, immediately surged towards the other area. He shrugged off Ronaldo's attempt to retrieve the situation and, with one last, sweet pass, slipped Adebayor in on the goal side of Wes Brown. This time the Togolese striker made no mistake, poking the ball beyond the Polish keeper.

Wenger greeted the goal with restrained pleasure, but at the final whistle he let himself go, clenching both fists and waving them in the air before shaking Ferguson's hand and, oddly, patting him on the bottom. If some observers thought the last gesture rather patronising, others argued that it was no more so than Ferguson's remarks in the build-up and the match programme, when he called Arsenal a 'transitional' team. When this was put to Wenger afterwards, he replied: "I don't think we are a team in transition because we are a big Club and we are ambitious. Yes, the players are young, but we have belief that we can win things." He then declared: "I think we can win the championship."

Just as he had declared four months earlier that they could win the Champions League Final against Barcelona – which they very nearly did. This, again, was classic Wenger, exuding a belief that both lifted and challenged his players. In keeping with the demands of modern football; Wenger doesn't do transitions because the game, at its very highest level, doesn't allow them. In the event, even he had to bow to grim reality in the 2006/2007 season when Arsenal, never really championship contenders, were knocked out of the three other competitions in which they had an interest in the space of just 11 days. They gave a good account of themselves in the Carling Cup Final only to lose to Chelsea, but did not impress in an FA Cup replay against Blackburn Rovers or when removed from the Champions League by PSV Eindhoven, whom Liverpool promptly thrashed in Holland. United, meanwhile, went on to recapture the Premiership title from Chelsea, finishing some 21 points ahead of Wenger's men. One small measure of satisfaction for Wenger, however, could be found in the fact that the only other team to win at Old Trafford were West Ham United, and that was on the last day of the season when the result was of no consequence to the champions, but of vital importance to the Londoners. At one stage there was even speculation that Arsenal might fail to secure a place in the Champions League for the 2007/2008 season, but a fine win over their nearest

rivals, Bolton Wanderers, secured by Fabregas with a spectacular first League goal of the season, reminded all and sundry that the future remained bright.

The rivalry between Wenger's Arsenal and Ferguson's United tends to magnify all that is best and worst in both managers. It is like a caricature: drawn large are the good, the bad and the ugly. And three years before the Fabregas-led triumph at Old Trafford that arena had witnessed something very ugly indeed from Wenger's Arsenal. The events of September 21, 2003, are remembered mainly for the sight of Martin Keown's manic taunting of Ruud van Nistelrooy after the Dutchman's last-minute penalty miss, which would have given United victory (and prevented Arsenal from achieving their historic feat of going through a Premiership season unbeaten). It was fortunate for football's image that Van Nistelrooy was more concerned with reproaching himself for hitting Jens Lehmann's crossbar than rising to Keown's bait. But Keown was not alone among Wenger's players in contributing to the chaotic dust-up with which an eagerly awaited event had concluded.

In all, five members of the Arsenal side were to be fined and/or banned by the FA, as well as the Club itself, which, upon being relieved of a record £175,000, sensibly issued a statement accepting that "what occurred during and immediately after the match fell well below the required standard". The FA clearly felt Arsenal must shoulder the overwhelming majority of blame for the scenes and few, even at Highbury, could disagree, though Wenger accepted responsibility with some reluctance.

On that day Vieira, who was sent off for incurring two yellow cards (Keown's behaviour may have owed something to a suspicion that Van Nistelrooy had exaggerated the effect of one aggressive challenge by the Arsenal midfielder), became the 52nd player to leave the field early in the seven years since Wenger had arrived at Arsenal. It had always been something of a paradox: here was this manager bent on producing the football of angels, yet his men could behave like devils and he seldom had a word of censure to offer, certainly not in public. All he would say was that he had not seen the incident, whatever it was.

Not even Ferguson, once described as the 'one-eyed monster' of Old Trafford, had such selective vision. It became a joke, this absurd excuse for departing from his customary eloquence. But something about the relationship with United kept getting under Wenger's skin. In the previous season Sol Campbell had flailed an arm, catching Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, and been red-carded; Wenger demanded that the United man apologise for going down too easily. Then, after the Community Shield match between the clubs, Campbell was charged by the FA over an incident the referee had not seen and Wenger

started to air conspiracy theories. When the multiple charges were laid after the Old Trafford scenes, he said it was laughable that the FA and certain sections of the media had deemed his players' conduct worse than dangerous tackles and accused this loose and unholy alliance of over-reaction.

In time he endorsed his board's apology and with a typically wry quip – "Don't forget we got the Uefa fair-play trophy," he told journalists at one of his weekly briefings at the Club's London Colney training ground, "It's the only European trophy we have won!" – became his normal affable self again. But we could reflect that maybe this tendency to special pleading was just part of football management's winning package. And that maybe, for all the differences between Wenger and Ferguson, there was more than one one-eyed monster in the Premiership.

The inescapable fact, however, was that Arsenal under Wenger were incurring twice as many red cards as United under Ferguson. To the credit of both Wenger and Arsenal as a whole, they seemed to treat the FA's severe response to their Old Trafford antics as a signal to improve their disciplinary record. The rate at which Arsenal collected both yellow and red cards diminished and, after the recurrent controversy of Wenger's first seven seasons, the next three saw them finish either first or second in the Premiership Fair Play League. Whether at home or abroad, they were usually to be found on their best behaviour. Even at Old Trafford, where, on October 24, 2004, they were the victims of aggression, albeit a more controlled form of it than Keown's the autumn before.

Arsenal had journeyed to Manchester as Premiership champions and with the intention of increasing their unbeaten record to 50 matches. It swiftly became obvious that United would fight to frustrate them and some of the treatment meted out – to José Antonio Reyes in particular, and chiefly by the brothers Gary and Phil Neville – was unpalatable. To compound Arsenal's sense of grievance, the referee, Mike Riley, chose not to send off Rio Ferdinand for a foul that many Arsenal supporters thought had denied Freddie Ljungberg a clear run on goal and later awarded Wayne Rooney a penalty when some neutrals judged Campbell had made, at worst, only slight contact with him. Van Nistelrooy, of all people, scored from the spot. Rooney later added a second and Arsenal's sequence had failed to reach its half-century. Wenger was furious and continued to smart for weeks afterwards.

Arsenal won only one of their next seven matches in the Premiership and Champions League (though they drew most of the others). Not that it could have been said to have cost them the title, which Chelsea ultimately took by a margin of 12 points. Nor was there a great deal of satisfaction in finishing second, above

United.

For Wenger a point of principle had been lost at Old Trafford. Some terrible tackles were sustained: in addition to Reyes, Ashley Cole suffered, his left leg buckling under the impact of a lunge by Van Nistelrooy which Riley did not even blow for, but which the FA, having watched a video recording, punished with a three-match ban. As Arsenal walked off defeated, their sense of injustice raging, the plastic tunnel resounded to an exchange of insults. Later accounts by players told of their surprise as Wenger argued with Ferguson, who berated him back by telling him to shut up and stop accusing Rooney of cheating for the penalty.

Nearly two years later, when he took an evolving team to the northwest – gone were Vieira, Dennis Bergkamp, Reyes, Campbell, Lauren and Cole, their places taken by the likes of Fabregas, Rosicky, Hleb, Adebayor, Johan Djourou and Emmanuel Eboué – they passed United into submission. A few weeks after that, someone who had not seen Wenger for a while met him in an airport lounge and complimented him on the rare quality of his team's performance that day in Manchester. His eyes twinkled and he smiled mischievously. "It does make a difference," he observed, "when they don't kick you off the park."

Only a very fit team could have worn United down as Arsenal did, by continuing to keep passing through Ferguson's side for nearly an hour and a half until one final thrust of the dagger completed the job. Fitness has always been fundamental to Wenger's approach. It has sometimes been said that one of his strokes of luck at Arsenal was in arriving shortly after Tony Adams so determinedly confronted his alcoholism. Given the status of Adams at the Club, this undoubtedly helped Wenger to break down the drinking culture that had previously been part of life at Arsenal – and indeed throughout English football – from time immemorial. Wenger seldom drinks more than the occasional glass of good red wine himself and it's possible that his antipathy to heavy drinking is partly a consequence of having spent a lot of his youth in his parents' pub-cumrestaurant, silently witnessing its effects. He was born in October 1949 and, although the Wenger family then lived in the small Alsatian village of Duppigheim, they spent much of their time running the Croix d'Or in Duttlenheim. The players of FC Duttlenheim, which at one stage featured the teenage Wenger and two of his brothers, drank there. It was a football pub in a football-minded area.

Wenger's father also had a car-parts business in Strasbourg, where Arsène went to university, combining his amateur football with studies in medicine, which he abandoned after a year, and economics. As football took an increasingly dominant role in his life, he appeared to become something of a



career student. Playing in midfield, and most notable for his passing and vision, Wenger progressed from village football to Mutzig, in France's regionalised Third Division, then Mulhouse of the Second Division, where he had a semi-professional contract. At Mulhouse he met – and impressed with his knowledge of the game – a highly respected coach called Paul Frantz. His reputation became such that, when Racing Strasbourg of the First Division needed someone to play alongside and coach their reserves, Wenger was contacted and became a full professional at last, at 28.

He dropped back to play sweeper while guiding the young hopefuls and even made the odd first-team appearance as the club won their only French championship in 1979. It was both the highlight of Wenger's playing career and its swansong. At 31 he retired to take charge of the reserves. At 33 he was given first-team responsibilities at Cannes and aged 34, in 1984 – the year that Michel Platini majestically led France to the European Championship on home soil – he finally took charge of a club's footballing affairs. Nancy, close to his Alsatian roots, had made the approach and had been Platini's first club. In fact, the offer came from Platini's father, Aldo. Wenger's salary was £30,000 a year.

In a well researched and beautifully written book entitled *Wenger: The Making Of A Legend*, Jasper Rees describes how Wenger had already formed some firm ideas. On food and drink, for example: "In came a dietician, spouting unfamiliar nostrums about no snacking between meals, banning energy-sapping puddings, maximising intake of raw or lightly boiled vegetables. When the players sat down to eat in the canteen, they suddenly discovered there was no bread on the table to pick at, and certainly no butter." Not only were the players lectured as to what they should be eating, their wives were also called in for instruction, on the grounds that they would be the ones doing the cooking at home.

As was to happen at Arsenal, he saw that players could benefit from a change of position. Just as Thierry Henry was to be transformed from a water-treading wide man into one of the world's leading central strikers, Wenger borrowed a winger by the name of Eric di Meo from Olympique Marseille and, a year later, sent him back south as a wing-back proficient enough to feature in two finals of the Champions League (or European Cup as it was then). Yet after a respectable mid-table finish in his first season, Nancy escaped relegation in the next only by winning a play-off with Mulhouse and the following season, in 1986/1987, they did go down. But not Wenger. He had moved that summer to Monaco, who had approached him a year earlier but been put off by Nancy's insistence that they buy out the remaining 12 months of his contract.

Interestingly, at Monaco, his first two signings were English; by way of a

neat counterpoint, his first two for Arsenal were to be French. Wenger has always been less interested in passports than in ability and the right attitude. Just as Rémi Garde and Patrick Vieira were later to turn up in London before the man who was to be their new boss, so too were Glenn Hoddle and Mark Hateley secured in advance for Monaco.

When training under Wenger began, the Monaco players noticed what their Arsenal counterparts were to experience nine years later: very precise sessions, everything short and intense and done to the split-second, even if it meant interrupting one exercise in order to proceed to the next, the intention being to keep the players' minds and feet sharp. Verbally, he was very concise. He had the tutor's gift for communication. As at Nancy, he had a temper, though. Everything had to be done his way and if any players deviated from it they might be snarled at. The system was 4-4-2 and they had to fit into it. Yet he always encouraged them to express themselves within that framework and, if they had the skills to do so, to entertain. Hoddle had the time of his professional life.

The 1987/1988 season, Wenger's first in charge, ended with Monaco as the champions of France. Yet at the end of each of the next five, the title went to Marseille with their star-studded sides including the likes of Didier Deschamps, Marcel Desailly, Jean-Pierre Papin, Abédi Pelé and Chris Waddle. Not to mention Di Meco and Manuel Amoros, the latter signed from Monaco. Wenger's lot were not exactly journeymen either: when he lost George Weah, the replacement was Jürgen Klinsmann and among those he brought through the ranks were three more World Cup winners in Henry, Emmanuel Petit and Lilian Thuram. But Marseille, it later transpired, were buying more than players' registrations. Under the cynical guidance of their charismatic president, Bernard Tapie, they were bribing opponents to go easy on them. They had fixed their title-clinching First Division game so they could focus on the European Cup Final with AC Milan. After this was discovered, Marseille were stripped of Le Championnat, relegated and barred from defending the European Champions League title that they had won in 1992/1993 by beating AC Milan 1-0. Tapie was sent to jail. Yet this measure of justice came too late to help Monaco, who some, including an outraged Wenger, thought had been robbed of at least two of those five championship titles.

Wenger had been offered the Bayern Munich job only for Monaco to refuse to let him leave, but at the start of the 1994/1995 season, with results going from patchy to disturbing, they sacked him. Japan, where he accepted an invitation from Grampus Eight, was just what he needed to wash away the bitter taste left by Tapie's cheating and his subsequent dismissal. He developed a deep admiration for the country and although the team, which was little more than a

music-hall joke when he arrived, took time to respond to his exhortations to accept more responsibility on the field, they were to become the second best side in Japan. Wenger was thoroughly refreshed and felt ready to return to Europe. Among the jobs on offer was that of technical director to the English FA – by now Hoddle was national manager – but the Frenchman wanted a club and Highbury's David Dein, knowing him from time spent in the south of France, resolved that it should be Arsenal. A year after first suggesting Wenger to his fellow board members, only to be rebuffed on the grounds that Bruce Rioch, of Bolton Wanderers, seemed a safer pair of hands, Dein tried again, more forcefully, and succeeded.

Wenger, for his part, knew enough about Arsenal to be aware that the Club had a tradition of favouring stability wherever possible. The parting of the ways with Rioch, Wenger said shortly before he left Nagoya to take up the reins at Highbury, had been out of character. He insisted that he would never have agreed to go to a club that changed managers frequently – "not because I am scared of being sacked, but because of the way I like to work," he said. Success and continuity went together, he believed, and for that reason he was sorry that Stewart Houston, the caretaker manager before his arrival from Japan, had decided, however understandably, to explore his potential as a manager at Queens Park Rangers. Instead Pat Rice became Wenger's link with the past, although the Frenchman was later to welcome Houston back to Arsenal as a scout specialising in advance study of European opponents. Even then, Wenger had a good grasp of O-level Arsenal: "Herbert Chapman? Ah, a great manager. The first to put numbers on players' backs," he said. "And the guy who gave Arsenal white sleeves."

Chapman, of course, was a big name in England before he arrived at Highbury, having led Huddersfield Town to two consecutive championships (before the side he had created claimed a third title after his move to Arsenal) but Wenger was not so celebrated when he came. Indeed the author and celebrity Arsenal fan Nick Hornby expressed the sceptic's view, as quoted in Jasper Rees's book: "I remember when Rioch was sacked. One of the papers had three or four names: it was [Terry] Venables, [Johan] Cruyff and at the end Arsène Wenger. Hornby remembers thinking it would be Wenger and adding the further thought to himself: 'Trust Arsenal to appoint the boring one that you haven't heard of'."

The headline in London's *Evening Standard* newspaper was along the same lines and memorably succinct: 'Arsène Who?' Those who felt Wenger would go the way of the only previous foreign manager of an English club, Jozef Vengloš – the Slovakian who had made little impression in his brief spell at Aston Villa

from 1990/1991 – were soon feeling pretty sheepish. Not that a Midas touch was immediately apparent: Wenger's first contact with the players was during the interval of their Uefa Cup first-round tie against Borussia Mönchengladbach, when he adjusted the team without altering their fortunes. Already trailing from the first leg, which a German side marshalled by Stefan Effenberg had won 3-2 at Highbury, Wenger's intervention was not sufficient to prevent their exit from the competition as they went down by the same scoreline.

He took full charge for the Premiership match at Blackburn Rovers on October 12, 1996, and that was won 2-0, with both goals coming from Ian Wright. The starting team contained nine Englishmen, a Welshman (John Hartson) and Patrick Vieira. A decade later, with Ashley Cole and Sol Campbell having been sold, Wenger would field sides containing not a single Englishman and no one would be surprised (though some critics might express disappointment). But he had promised evolution rather than all-out revolution and there was no mass marching to the tumbrils of the George Graham era's faded aristocrats.

Indeed the veterans at the back were to thrive under his tutelage, as was Dennis Bergkamp, whom Arsenal had signed from Inter Milan during the brief reign of Rioch. The likes of Hartson, Paul Merson and (in time) David Platt departed, but not without contributing to a season that saw Arsenal finish third in a style that was swiftly gaining the fans' approval.

Wenger took his squad to France and Holland to prepare for the next campaign and acknowledged that spirits had been raised. Asked to express his hopes and fears, he replied: "My fear is that we cannot live up to all of the expectations of the people." Although he had brought in Marc Overmars, Petit and Gilles Grimandi, the loss of Hartson and Merson was compounded by the injury that would keep Adams out for a while. "In the longer term we shall be strong," he said, "because the squad is now full of potential." By which he meant, principally, that Nicolas Anelka had been secured from Paris St-Germain. He would also have been thinking of Matthew Upson, whom he had bought from Luton Town.

As it turned out, the short term was not too bad either, for 1997/1998 was to be an extraordinary season, one which confirmed not only Wenger as one of the brightest stars in England's managerial firmament, but also completed his education in how the game is perceived in this country, where it appears to be a matter of either triumph or disaster with precious little in between.

A bit of what Wenger suspected might be mischief from the press came his way, too, in the form of an accusation that there were cliques in the dressing room – English and French mainly (we were left to presume that the Dutch duo

of Bergkamp and Overmars had chosen to remain neutral). Suffice to say that, long before the Championship and FA Cup triumphs were hailed, the rumour had been forgotten. It had begun to arise a few weeks before Christmas. Despite an early Uefa Cup exit at the hands of PAOK Salonika in Greece, the domestic season had been going well and even Arsenal's first Premiership defeat, at Derby County, was followed by a victory over Manchester United. But the results suddenly deteriorated and three of the next four matches were lost, the last to Blackburn at Highbury, where Arsenal were jeered up their own tunnel after the final whistle.

The tales of ethnic tension ensued, irritating Wenger, who denied them flatly. "It's strange how the press behave," he said. "If you saw us at work, you would see a different world from the one which is portrayed, one that surprises us when we read about it. The players laugh with each other. On Wednesday they had a snowball fight. If you saw this sort of thing, you would realise that the analysis is wrong. The guy who wrote it probably doesn't like foreign players."

Despite Wenger's assurances to the contrary, the truth was that something of a culture clash did exist at the Club at the time. It was a natural consequence of Wenger's arrival: British players were accustomed to relatively light training, followed by surges of enthusiasm in matches, whereas continentals preferred a smoother transition between the two. But no one was complaining about Wenger's methods of training and preparation – his insistence that the players alter their eating, drinking and sleeping habits and become almost religious about stretching their muscles – when Arsenal were winning. Nor, broadly speaking, was it doubted that such things were good for footballers. What irked Wenger was that the players' unity was being questioned when those old favourites known as injury and suspension were, in his view, more relevant to the run of disappointing results. "Yes, the English players complain sometimes that we train too much," he conceded. "But look how well they are doing – the likes of Steve Bould at 35 and Nigel Winterburn at 34. The way they have practised has been fantastic. And both are having excellent seasons."

So, he concluded, let there be no more talk of cliques. "It is natural, when you are abroad, to speak to a team-mate who comes from the same country. Patrick Vieira speaks more to Emmanuel Petit than to Tony Adams. But in a game Vieira is willing to put his foot in for Adams and that is the important thing." Vieira promptly made his first start in five Premiership matches, Leicester City were beaten and Arsenal did not lose another league match until May, when the title was already theirs. They secured the Double by beating Newcastle United in the 1998 FA Cup Final at Wembley, but the match that probably sticks in most memories was at Old Trafford in mid-March, when the

two Neville brothers, Gary and Phil, were repeatedly tormented by Overmars, the scorer of the only goal of a game that gave Arsenal such confidence that afterwards they did not drop a single point from a possible 30. A winger has often helped Arsenal to take titles: George Armstrong in 1971, Brian Marwood in 1989, Anders Limpar in 1991. Now here was Overmars. But this genuflection to history would have been seen by Wenger as a mere detail. He had a lot more ground to break.

First, however, he lost some ground to Ferguson. The next season belonged to Manchester United. It might not have done – as late as mid-April they were neck-and-neck with Arsenal for the title – but the clubs were drawn together in the FA Cup semi-finals and that collision proved crucial. Bergkamp failed to beat Peter Schmeichel from the penalty spot and Ryan Giggs raced to the other end to score a glorious winner. Or at least that is how it seemed. The moment was pivotal. Arsenal, though they won their next four league matches, fell to a Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink goal at Leeds United and that was it for the title, their last hope of a trophy. United, meanwhile, were irresistible, beating Newcastle in the FA Cup Final and going on to take the Champions League trophy by overcoming Bayern Munich in Barcelona with a late twist that, for sheer drama, evoked comparison with Arsenal's title triumph at Liverpool exactly a decade earlier. Arise, Sir Alex.

Wenger, in contrast, had fared poorly in the Champions League; Arsenal played their group matches at Wembley that year and crowds of more than 73,000 were no compensation for the loss of two points to Dynamo Kiev and three to Lens under the shadow of the Twin Towers, where many, both inside and outside the Club, felt they had conceded the advantage of Highbury's narrow and atmospheric confines. They did not even make it to the knockout stages.

The next season brought revenge over Lens – whom Arsenal overcame in the Uefa Cup semifinal before losing to Galatasary in Copenhagen – but no domestic success. True, they finished second to United in the Premiership, but by a margin of 18 points, and in the cups they did nothing of note. The underlying picture, however, was brighter. Freddie Ljungberg had established himself in the squad and youth development had been transformed, the arrival of Jérémie Aliadière emphasising that it had become international. But the most important factor was that Wenger had re-established his relationship with Thierry Henry, who had started under his wing at Monaco before trying his luck in Italy with Juventus. The second most important factor was that he had converted Henry into a striker, and the benefits could be vividly seen in the 2000/2001 season.

Again there were no trophies, but Wenger was getting closer to the Arsenal

ideal. The FA Cup Final against Liverpool, which Arsenal lost as unluckily (Henry dazzled, but Michael Owen got the winner) as they were to be fortunate in beating Manchester United four years later, underlined the growing influence of the French on English football. On the one side was Wenger, on the other his friend Gérard Houllier; both were doing well (though Houllier's star was to wane after he returned, perhaps too quickly, from lifesaving surgery) and both settled with clubs they had known for some years before their arrivals in England. Liverpool had beckoned Houllier in 1998, shortly before France won the World Cup, and there is no doubt that Wenger's achievements since his arrival at Arsenal had swayed the Merseyside club. Houllier had met Wenger at a coaching course in the early 1980s. "I could see there was something special in Arsène," he said. "And Monaco were the club to see it."

Wenger was always an assiduous student of the game, but he agreed with Houllier that education was not everything, saying: "The most important parts of this job are human management and your philosophy of football – and I don't think you can learn those on a course." Wenger's philosophy was starting to come through in Arsenal's performances in Europe and they reached the Champions League quarter-finals before going out to Valencia on away goals. But the trophy drought was about to end in spectacular fashion, with a second Double in four years.

Before sealing a love affair with the Millennium Stadium as goals from Ray Parlour and Ljungberg put Chelsea to the sword 2-0 in the 2002 FA Cup Final, Arsenal conducted a splendid League campaign, with Henry leading from the front while Ljungberg and Robert Pires chipped in with vital goals from the flanks. Sylvain Wiltord did his bit too, of course: few Arsenal fans will forget the joy of his clincher at Old Trafford. Yet in the Champions League they remained inconsistent, as magnificent performances against Bayer Leverkusen and Juventus were balanced by failures away from Highbury. Yet the side was flowering and soon after they returned from the summer break for the 2002/2003 season the critics were asking if this was the greatest team ever. Goals were coming not just from Henry but, it appeared, from everywhere: Ashley Cole contributed to a 5-2 defeat of West Bromwich Albion, Touré to a 4-1 thrashing administered at Leeds. Wenger's observation at the end of the previous season, that it would be nice to go through a campaign unbeaten, was turned by the media, a little unfairly, into a boast.

Football has a habit of punishing such aspirations and, after a relative unknown called Wayne Rooney had dished out Arsenal's first defeat of the Premiership season at Everton, three more followed before Christmas. Manchester United, thus invited back into the race, hardly dropped a point after

the turn of the year and regained the title. Arsenal had to be content with another FA Cup, secured by Pires against Southampton, and an honourable exit from Europe in the familiar surroundings of Valencia's Mestalla Stadium, where John Carew's double overtook one from an inspired Henry. At that time it was asked if their attention to style, for all the praise it received, might be a handicap in the sense that they tended to neglect the scuffed shot or goal headed in from a corner. There had been a reminder of this in the Mestalla when, after Ljungberg had turned and found Pires on the edge of the penalty area, Pires cutely flicked on to Henry instead of shooting with the Valencia goal apparently at his mercy.

"Yes," Wenger said, "I have heard that we over-elaborate. I don't think it is so. I do sometimes think we miss the player who scores the ugly goal. It's not that we don't want to score it. It's just that we lack the sort of player who gets in front of the defender and gets the header in."

He had attempted to remedy the perceived deficiency by signing Francis Jeffers from Everton. This raised two issues. The first was his supposed unwillingness to rely on English players: a blind alley, since his job at Arsenal has always been to produce results for the Club rather than the country in which it is situated. The second aspect was Wenger's purism. It could hardly have been more emphatically vindicated than in the Premiership season of 2003/2004, throughout which Arsenal went unbeaten from start to finish, emulating the achievement of Preston North End's 'Invincibles' in 1888/1889. Nobody except Wenger thought it could be done in modern football. And, of course, it was done handsomely. Henry led the way: he was to become a serial Footballer Of The Year. Arsenal even threatened to go the distance in the Champions League until Chelsea, with their new financial clout, won at Highbury in the quarter-finals, and got to the semi-finals of both domestic cups, using the Carling version to give experience to the likes of Aliadière and Fabregas.

The unbeaten Premiership run stood at 49 when Manchester United ended it amid controversy, but by now we could see that Wenger had built a team for all challenges. They could not quite get the better of Chelsea after Jose Mourinho's managerial gifts had been grafted on to the fabulous wealth of Roman Abramovich, but finishing second in Chelsea's first title season and reaching the Champions League final in the second were reasonable compensations.

There are a few general reflections to be made about Wenger. One is that he buttresses the notion that art is often the product of fiery temperament. Wenger, though he controls himself most of the time, has always been apt to blow up. Enzo Scifo, the distinguished Belgian midfielder who played under him at Monaco, called him explosive, while Mark Hateley said he had a ferocious temper. Wenger has conceded that "I go over the top because I am passionate".



Another is that, while his record in finding quality players at giveaway prices is second to none (Vieira, Anelka, Henry, Petit, Touré and Fabregas, to name but a few), he is also responsible for bringing to the Club players such as David Grondin, Christopher Wreh, Igor Stepanovs and Jeffers, all of whom made little impression. He came to England wearing glasses and, although they have disappeared, he has given the country a spectacle, doing much to foster English football's image across the world.

The 10th anniversary tributes were generous. "He's brought a new dimension to the way Arsenal play," said George Graham, a compliment all the more worth recording because it came from a proud precursor. Graham then added: "He's right up there with Herbert Chapman." Alan Hansen called Wenger a genius. But as sensitive a comment as any came from Roy Keane, the Frenchman's erstwhile adversary. "Some people live off football and some people live for football," the former Manchester United captain said, making it abundantly clear of which category he thought Wenger was an exemplar. "All credit to him."

## INTERVIEW

# **Wenger on Wenger**

**The cultured, urbane Frenchman talks in depth about his background, his personality, his football philosophy and why he wants his teams to be both winners and entertainers**

There was a man, a warrior or a visionary, perhaps both, who set himself the task in tribal England of gathering together the greatest and most chivalrous of combatants to join him in a quest for such creative success that it would enter the annals of history. And so it came to pass.

Arsène Wenger: the Highbury years saw Arsenal win three Championships, four FA Cups (including two Doubles), and reach the 2006 Champions League Final. The record speaks for itself. But there was more. Arsenal under Wenger have become beautiful. A team once best known for dourness and a minimum of frills suddenly became the spiritual home of expressionism and thrills. From Anglo-Saxon graft to French romance in a period of weeks. It was as though an Arsenal made of iron flew to pieces only to be rebuilt with platinum and precious gems. And all because of a man who the English press called ‘Arsène Who?’ when he arrived in September 1996. A man who had been building all his life towards the custodianship of a football club into which he would pour all his learning, his passion, his philosophy and his will. It was a formidable combination.

Wenger was always a manager-in-waiting, although neither he nor Arsenal understood how their stories would one day be entwined. While he was a boy in his Alsace village team, the only one who refused a bottle of white wine after the game, Arsenal were recording their lowest-ever crowd at Highbury – less than 5,000 people against Leeds United. Forty years later, exactly, they would combine in the Uefa Champions League Final together – the manager of international renown and the team of inter-continental superstars. By the time Arsenal won the Double in 1971, Wenger had endeared himself to various managers as a lower-league amateur midfielder with average pace, a fast brain and boundless enthusiasm. At the time Arsenal beat Manchester United in the 1979 FA Cup Final, their future manager had already played his last football match and was coaching, at the age of 30.

As George Graham was installed as the new Arsenal manager in 1986, Wenger was about to lead Cannes to his one-and-only experience of relegation. But by then he had already been approached to become the new manager of Monaco, and he was still in harness to the Cote D’Azur club when he happened to land in London one New Year’s Day after a reconnaissance mission to Turkey.

He had a few hours to spare and wanted to take in a game. Tickets were arranged for an Arsenal match. Six years later a contract was arranged for him to become the new Arsenal manager, fresh from the comparative anonymity of Japan. It was a controversial appointment. Who was he? What sort of pedigree did he have? Could winning a French Championship with Monaco in 1988, and the Emperor's Cup in Japan with Nagoya Grampus Eight, possibly provide the appropriate springboard into the star-studded cauldron of the Premiership? He was the first foreign manager appointed from a club abroad since the advent (inglorious and fleeting) of Josef Vengloš at Aston Villa. He was introduced to his team, a battle-hardened troop of professionals, including two recovering alcoholics, Paul Merson and Tony Adams. They saw a tall, thin, bespectacled man looking in no way like their concept of a football manager. He saw potential, a challenge, a quest. Within two years Arsenal had won the Double, and high praise for their beautiful football. The transition was so swift it bordered on the miraculous.

How many football managers truly think like this? Did Sir Alex Ferguson talk of love like a hopeless romantic? He did not. But perhaps the very foreignness of Arsène Wenger allowed him to take cultural gambles. He could pick an all-foreign team and utter un-British sentences full of sentiment and emotion, yet still retain his dignity. And dignified he certainly is, when you meet him. It is a lived-in face: attractive, lively but scoured into lines by the multitude of thought processes (90 per cent of them about football) that rage behind his eyes. He is slightly distracted, as though seeing into the penalty areas of the future. He is charming, witty, funny, surprisingly tall, unusually lean, definitely intelligent and with just a touch of your old Religious Education teacher, the one who was always knocking books off his desk. His politeness is exemplary, his strictness is demonstrable and the plates in the players' restaurant were chosen by his own hand – a slight bowl-effect was included, so that they could eat pasta sauce more easily.

What a leader. And all the time he talks – of the instillation of values like belief, pride, decency and desire in the hearts of his players; of the triumphs and ragged despairs of every football manager; of the rise of a magnificent stadium from the environs of a dump in North London and the establishment of a visionary base camp in the depths of the Hertfordshire countryside – the thought nags that he reminds you of someone. That's it ... King Arthur. Exemplar of teamship, mentor of knights, constructor of a new order, upholder of chivalry (give or take those bookable offences that Wenger famously did not see) and vanquisher of the Saxon hoards. They do have, on the face of it, a very great deal in common, give or take nine centuries and Arthur's possible mythical status.

Wenger certainly vanquished Anglo-Saxons from his starting line-up, culminating in the day, February 14, 2005, when the whole Arsenal squad, all 16, for a match against Crystal Palace, contained not a single British nor Irish player. All foreign. He didn't care. "I look at the player, not the passport," he says.

If you pursue the romantic theme, he took the vision he had been polishing all his life, as a lowly libero in the slow lane of French football, as a student at Strasbourg University studying politics and economics, as a novice youth coach for Racing Club de Strasbourg (much to the disappointment of his family, who had hopes of a white-collar career for their clever son), as the manager of Cannes on £300 per week, and on to Nancy, Monaco and Grampus Eight, in Japan.

He arrived at Arsenal in the mood to build his version of Camelot on English soil, not exactly rescuing damsels, but certainly grappling against formidable beasts, not least Sir Alex's Manchester United. You could stretch the point further and even see the Uefa Champions League trophy as his Holy Grail, the affirmation of his whole life and work. It was one of his dearest dreams, to be hailed the creator of the greatest team in Europe. Not for the fame, for the achievement. Sadly, his only experience of the competition as a player left him defeated 0-4 by Duisberg, of West Germany. The sweeping didn't work that day.

In his time at Highbury, he has reached the final in 2006, tasting defeat in Paris, of all places, against the Spanish luminaries, Barcelona. Far from despairing – although it took him a week to sleep again – he ultimately took pride in the achievement. "It was the miracle of the year," he says. Arsenal supporters would agree, but would not confine miraculous happenings to any one year. It all looked like a fantasy from the red seats. That the Club would embark on their most lavishly successful period of all time, mirroring and then surpassing that glorious epoch in the 1930s, was miracle enough. But that the football produced by a team called Arsenal would be lauded as lush in skill and lovely to watch, that was the true revolution.

Curiously, it began with defeat. The new manager was introduced to his new team at half-time during their match away in the Uefa Cup against Borussia Mönchengladbach. This would surely inspire them. He changed the formation of the defence; Arsenal promptly lost. It was a humble beginning. But from that lowest of points, Wenger and his team arose to very great heights indeed.

## **The interview**

"I modelled myself on Franz Beckenbauer a little bit [in my playing days], because he was also a libero, a sweeper, super-elegant and classy." And was Arsène Wenger, the player, in that mould? "No, I was not elegant and classy." He is laughing out loud at himself. "But you can still dream to be. When you have not the physical potential, you need the brain. But, you know, times have changed as well. When I played in my village, I never really practised until the age of about 18. I started very late. And because of that I've got a physical complex. I still work on my physique every day. I do not seem to understand that my career is finished!" He does not demonstrate his abilities to his team, does he? "Not with my players. But I still keep fit physically. I still dream to come back one day." That is, of course, what they said about King Arthur. That he would come back one day, although not as a serious-minded, thin-limbed sweeper in spectacles whose speed of foot could not match his racier brain.

The fact is, Wenger the player was no great superstar. He moved from the Duttlenheim village first team, to AS Mutzig in the French Third Division, to FC Mulhouse (where he earned £50 a week as a semi-professional), to AS Vauben, and finally to Racing Club de Strasbourg where he was eventually, and wisely, preferred as a coach. It is not the meteoric record of a French Pelé; instead it was the steady progress of an obsessive in subconscious training to manage. He loved football – loved it from earliest childhood as he listened to the chatter and tactics in his parents' pub/restaurant, La Croix D'Or, in Duttlenheim, which doubled as headquarters of the village football team. He would pay a franc to watch the FA Cup Final on the only television in the village school hall, and arrive early to ensure that he got a seat. Sister Joseph was the village teacher, but she did not frown upon the extracurricular use of the hall; Alsace was football mad. "She understood," Wenger says.

He was a sensible young man, even then. "When you want to be at the top of your job you can only do it with your body. And maybe because I was not as strong as some players were, I realised pretty quickly that the more your body is ready to perform, the more chance you have to play well. I thought that was just being professional. Also I saw drunken behaviour in the restaurant: when I started to play in the village team their 11 players drank 10 bottles of wine after the game. I didn't drink at all: I was the only one. And they said, 'You are not a man because you don't drink alcohol'. There was fantastic pressure on people to drink. They used it as a team-bonding exercise, but the next day they didn't know what they had done.

"I was not so solitary, though; I liked to be with friends, but I was very determined. I wanted to play football, but I never could dream of becoming a

professional footballer because in a village at that time you were so much isolated. A professional football player was on a different planet. But I wanted to do what I did well."

That was the battle cry of the greatest Arsenal managers: they wanted to do what they did well. Just as it exemplified the philosophy of the Club's last manager at Highbury, so it dictated every action of the first manager to make Arsenal "great". In Herbert Chapman, Arsenal's Napoleonic leader from 1925-1934, Wenger has a non-identical twin. Light years apart in terms of originating cultures, personality and attachment to golf (Chapman swore by its powers, while Wenger has never played), they nevertheless agreed on the important matters of life: that every ounce of effort and every fibre of being should be put to the betterment of the Club; that happy players are better players; that work ethic, sports science, clean living and decent behaviour were the lynchpins of successful endeavours. And, funnily enough, Chapman was apparently as average at football, despite turning professional and playing for Tottenham Hotspur, as the beanpole Wenger himself.

"Although we can hardly say he is in the first flight of footballers, he is a most conscientious player and a gentleman both on and off the field," the *Tottenham Herald* wrote in 1906, with a dash of faint praise, having witnessed the prowess of their striker bought for £70 from Northampton Town. Like Wenger, Chapman knocked around a little in the lower leagues, turning out for Sheffield, Stalybridge Rovers, Rochdale, Grimsby Town, Swindon Town, Sheppey United and Worksop reserves, among others. Like Wenger, he was also studying, in his case to become a mining engineer, having grown up the son of a coal miner in the Yorkshire town of Kiveton Park.

Wenger's parents, Alphonse and Louise, were not best pleased when their son revealed that he would not, after all, be entering the family motor-parts business. "When I became the coach of Strasbourg youth team my family were very strongly opposed to that. Being coach meant almost giving your whole life to football."

There is no record of Chapman's familial reaction when he was lured as player-manager to Northampton, then bottom of the Southern League, but presumably they were pleasantly surprised when the ailing club became champions two years later. He was persuasive, imaginative, innovative, demanding and insisted on high standards of behaviour. "Never do anything on the field to an opponent that will later prevent your meeting him in church and shaking hands with him," summed up the Chapman approach. Perhaps these were not the exact words that Wenger used to counsel the young, hot-headed Patrick Vieira, but while both men had players sanctioned for bad behaviour,



they both essentially believed that fine football should be encouraged over foul play.

Undoubtedly, both men paid regard to the spectators, not merely as a soundtrack or an irritant, but as real people deserving of high standards of accommodation. While Wenger talked of the fans in terms of "love", Chapman demonstrated his sense of responsibility – most dramatically by contributing to the overhaul of Highbury into an innovative stadium in the 1930s. Did Arsenal fans sense this kinship with the past when Wenger was installed as the new manager? Not at first. He was unrecognised, foreign and hard to fathom. Glenn Hoddle raved about him, yet was this backing a good thing from a player so inextricably linked to Spurs? Wenger remained an enigma. Even as he has become more familiar, every facet of his character seems to have been trumped or countermanded by another, directly opposite, trait:

**Romantic** (his love for beautiful football) versus **Pragmatic** (his ruthless desire to win).

**Truthful** (his hatred of the bribery scandal perpetrated by Olympique Marseilles that devastated and tainted his time at Monaco) v **Evasive** ("I didn't see it").

**Cavalier** (champion of all-out attack) v **Roundhead** (a man attached to his video machine).

**Famous** (he is manager of Arsenal) v **Reclusive** (never seen at parties, at premieres or even with a new haircut).

**Strict** (a by-product of his Germanic efficiency) v **Libertine** (an expression of his Gallic adventurism).

**Liberator of Youth** (see Fabregas, Eboué, Flamini, Walcott) v **Affirmer of Experience** (the Arsenal back five, creaking with age, that won him the Double in 1998).

**English** (his chosen venue) v **Foreign** (most of his team).

**Perfectionist** (in football matters) v **Clouseau** (his nickname after innumerable clumsy episodes that prompt laughter among his players).

**Professor** (complete with a double degree from Strasbourg University) v **Schoolboy** (his lifelong, undimmed enthusiasm for a game).

**Widely Intelligent** (obviously) v **Single-tracked Trainspotter** (obsessed with football).

**Serious** (the thinking man's manager) v **Sense of Humour** ("I was the best ... in my village").

**Emotional** (see the touchline) v **Distant** (always away at the next match in his head).

How do you extract a man's essential nature from such a catalogue? He says,

somewhat enigmatically: "I refused a long time ago to find out who I am really. But I know I can master all the aspects of me – I can give them a lease of life, or not. There is a continuity in me, but also many contradictions. I acknowledge that.

"It was an awesome responsibility, yes, to be made the manager of Arsenal. It was good that when I first took over, I didn't realise how big the Club is. At first, I just tried to do my job as well as I could, thinking, 'OK, they will let me know if they are happy, or not'. I just tried to be successful and work the way I love to work. My own training methods, my own way to play the game, my own way to bring in players. It isn't easy to be successful in this job, but if you have no freedom, it is impossible."

Little did he know that the "awesome responsibility" would be his when he made the spur-of-the-moment decision to visit Highbury on that New Year's Day in 1990 to watch Arsenal against Crystal Palace, en route to Monaco from watching players in Turkey. "That was where I met David Dein [the Arsenal vice-chairman]." Dein remembered the moment well. "My wife came and asked me if I knew that the manager of Monaco was in the cocktail lounge. I said I'd like to meet him because we had a boat in the South of France and I used to go to Monaco regularly. I remember he was a very thin guy, wearing a raincoat. His English wasn't that good then, but fortunately I spoke French adequately well. We chatted and I said, 'What are you doing tonight?'. He was free, so I told him that we were going to the house of some showbusiness friends of ours, the former drummer of the band Marmalade, and he was welcome to come. Amazingly, he said yes.

"Someone decided when we were there that we should play a game of charades. Arsène had something like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He said, 'I'll try', and acted it out. He did brilliantly. Everyone got it straightaway. The more time that I spent with him, the more impressed I became. And anyway, with a name like Arsène for Arsenal, it was written in the stars."

However, Wenger claims to have had no such premonition. "I didn't think at the time that I would end up managing Arsenal," he says. "I had just arrived in Monaco the year before and the club had no tradition in Europe, so I wanted to build one there." He and Dein kept in touch, though, and the Englishman became increasingly impressed with Wenger's interaction with his players at Monaco, the directors, the press. "I thought, this man's a class act," Dein says. "Every time we were in the South of France, we'd socialise. Then in 1995, when George Graham had his little mishap, I said to the board that I had been tracking the Monaco manager carefully and thought we should very seriously consider him. By an amazing coincidence he happened to be staying at my house when the

Graham story broke. I said to him, 'Do you want me to promote you, because, with all due respect, you are an unknown quantity in this country?'. In the end, we concluded that it was too much of a gamble. Foreign managers didn't come to England at that time. We had a short-list and we thought Bruce Rioch would be a safe pair of hands after all the trauma we had been through. He had done well at Bolton Wanderers and Middlesbrough, a sergeant-major type: polished shoes, straight as a die... But, basically, it was the wrong decision.

"In the meantime, Arsène had gone off to Japan. I was still in touch with him; I used to send him all our videos and press-cuttings and, being the man he is, he actually watched them. After a year, we reconsidered the Rioch appointment. He didn't do badly. We were in fourth place in the League, but we asked ourselves, 'Is this really the man to take us to the heights?'. Graham had given us a taste of success and we wanted it to continue. I was much more pushy the next time on Arsène's behalf. The board, to their credit, said, 'OK, fine. Let's go for it'."

Yet first Arsenal had to negotiate Wenger's departure from Grampus Eight, who had been rather pleased with their recent acquisition. When he had arrived they had been bottom of the 12-team J League, but by the end of the season they had moved up to second and had won the Emperor's Cup. Sensing that Arsenal needed a show of force to secure their man, Dein left for the Far East in the company of the Club chairman Peter Hill-Wood, and director Danny Fiszman. "This had to be an undercover mission. The press was speculating, rumours were abounding. Everyone was talking about Terry Venables, Bobby Robson – the usual suspects – and yet here we were trying to negotiate the Japanese railway system, like three lost sheep, in search of a manager. Anyway, we got there eventually, met the chairman of Grampus Eight and after negotiations, Arsène said the earliest he could leave was October, after the start of the English season. We said: 'We'll wait for you,' and came to an agreement.

"Now we're heading back to the airport in Tokyo and who should we bump into but three British air stewardesses. We panicked. We were on a secret mission and we were going to get busted by the aircraft staff from home. They started talking to us. We had to pretend that we were bankers in the commodities business and luckily they didn't recognise us. We were absolutely paranoid our cover would be broken."

Blithely unaware of the inadvertent chaos he was causing, Wenger prepared to leave Japan. He had come to admire and respect the country, but he was still in the thrall of European football. The club agreed to release him and he promised to help find them a successor. "I asked them to move as quickly as possible. They were not in too much of a hurry to do it." In the end, as befitted

the location, the transfer was conducted in an honourable manner and Arsenal just had to wait.

"Well, they say football is a love story that always finishes badly. Because either you go at your peak when people don't want you to go, or you go when people don't want you to stay any more." No one knew this better than Wenger who had both experiences with Monaco in the space of three months. First, they refused him permission to move to Bayern Munich at the behest of no less a figure than his former role model, Franz Beckenbauer. And then a few games into the following season, he was fired.

It all changed in a virtual instant. Not so much the personnel – although Patrick Vieira arrived, as if by magic, from Milan – but the ethos, the optimism and, above all, the game. "I just did what looked natural to me. To encourage the players to go forward, to express themselves, to put other teams under pressure. When I arrived the dominating teams were Manchester United and Liverpool. That first year, when we went to Liverpool, I could see we had a little bit of a complex. We got beaten quite easily by United. But at home we beat them and I could see: 'OK, we do not think they are completely untouchable.' I bought Vieira, but the rest were the same. Dennis Bergkamp was here and I still had the old defence. They were resilient and not ready to die. They were, as well, all intelligent. They did understand very quickly that maybe they could have a few more years. I revised my view that 30 was nearly too old for a player because they all had the hunger of a young boy starting [out]. Nigel Winterburn, Lee Dixon, Steve Bould, Martin Keown, Tony Adams: when they were on the pitch they were ready to die to win."

Wenger's first game in charge, against Sunderland on September 25, 1996, featured David Seaman in goal, a defence of Dixon, Bould, Adams, Winterburn, a midfield with David Platt, Patrick Vieira, Merson and Ray Parlour, and a strike-force of Ian Wright and John Hartson – a predominantly English team with an exotic dash of French and Welsh (not that the rugged Hartson has often been described as exotic). How soon that would change and how often he would deploy his men in different positions from those previously assigned. He was a passionate student of character, all the better to assign a player to a role that would maximise his talents. Parlour was put out to the wing, Adams was reinvented as a forward-foraging defender instead of a flat-out stopper and Hartson was gently let go.

"I always feel the career of a player should be decided by his psychological and physiological profile. He must be as close as possible to the position where he plays. Sometimes it's by accident he's in a position. You would be surprised. If you ask them where they played as a kid and why, most of the time they say,

‘Oh, I played central defender because the usual guy was off that day’." He began the trick with himself, moving back from midfield to sweeper. The culmination of his skill would be the conversion of a winger called Thierry Henry into one of the world’s most renowned strikers. But there were countless other examples: even in his early years at Cannes, he converted the forward Eric Bertrand into a full-back and the left winger Eric di Meco, a French international, into a left-back. In his time with Arsenal, Emmanuel Petit was moved from left-back to midfield, the midfielders Lauren and Kolo Touré into defence, and Mathieu Flamini from midfield to full-back. Wenger, the ultimate mover and shaker. "It is something you feel with practice," he says simply.

Understanding a player’s natural character, Wenger feels, is made easier by analysing their behaviour on the pitch. "In football, you have all the drama, the happiness of life – like theatre. But it is more real because in a game you reveal your real nature. I don’t believe it when people say, ‘He’s a very nice guy off the pitch, but on the pitch, he’s a bad guy’. I think that when he has to do something in life that really matters, this player will be who he is on the pitch. On the pitch, I know exactly who you are, what matters to you. The revelation of the real character is in the game. You forget all your barriers that you set in your social life. It’s like a guy who drinks. He becomes who he is when he is drunk.

"And, yes, it is the same for a manager under duress. Exactly the same. That makes it very interesting in my case. Because you can sometimes be surprised by your bad side. Of course I have a dark side. You want to win. You want to win so much that sometimes you forget to respect the rules. When you don’t win, you have to acknowledge the respect of your opponents as well. Sometimes I can’t do that. It is a dark side because the perfect side would be to say, ‘Well done. You played better’. And that’s it. I aspire to that. You never know, in 50 years I might achieve it." And he smiles broadly.

There have been times when his impassioned response to events in a match has led to criticism and, occasionally, disciplinary procedures. In October 2000 he was fined £100,000 and given a 12-match touchline ban, subsequently reduced on appeal, for engaging in a disagreement with officials. "I feel like I have killed someone," he said at the time of the harshness of the punishment. In the final throes of Highbury’s last season, when Tottenham Hotspur were the visitors in a crucial league game, Wenger was seen in vehement argument with Martin Jol, his Spurs counterpart. He cared, and the extent to which he cared sometimes teetered over into aggression. Modest aggression, though; in Monaco he was known to fly into rare, but serious rages. At Cannes, he had once had to stop the team bus to be physically sick following a 0-3 defeat. His sojourn in Japan had tempered his anger and sharpened his control, but he could still finish

matches at Highbury with his tie at half mast, rent to that position in frustration.

"Is it anger, is it aggression, or is it a desire to be successful? Would I compromise my principles? On occasions, yes, as first and foremost, I am a winner. But long term that's not my attitude or that of my players," he says. "Where does the anger come from? I don't know. My father and my mother were both quite excitable, but I feel the post-war world in which they lived was quite a rough world. The football world is also quite rough. You have to assert your personality and you need a high level of motivation. I control it now by being in control and thinking about the consequences of what I do. I learnt to do this. I didn't always have the 'off' switch. I have seen very talented players and managers lose themselves to anger. Of course, you have to deal with stress. But football is first of all, happiness. Because it's play and the kid wants to play. Wanting to win is happiness as well. Only being scared to lose is sadness. A lot of things disturb me, but it is not a fear to lose. It is for you to master this fear. You have constant dialogues going on in your brain all the time: you speak to *you*. So you can master that in a positive way. I was always concerned about dominating my animal feeling. Not really dominating. I mean, knowing myself better.

"We are all like the donkey with a carrot in front. He walks his whole life to get this carrot. That is what human beings are like with happiness – sometimes you touch it; you open your mouth, but it goes away. But you still keep going. One day, you never know, you might catch it..." He has been miming the actions all the way through this donkey soliloquy and he is grinning. He must be a man of boundless optimism. "Yes," he says seriously. "I believe in human beings."

He has a paternal attitude to what he calls "my players" at Arsenal, selected for a string of qualities way beyond mere facility with a football. "The ideal player is one who gives absolutely everything for the team, but they must respect the rules. I don't know how good I was as a player but I know one thing, I was a fair player.

The beauty of our sport comes from the fact that it is, first and foremost, a team sport. That means you have to share with other people. You have to be ready to win together. To bring your qualities to the team and not try to use the team to highlight your qualities.

"It is a trap – a trick – in the modern football world that the media is encouraging the ego side of our game and not encouraging the team ethic. Yet the team ethic is the beauty of our sport, so if you are not really careful the players can be trapped into egotism. We have survived this problem because over the years we've managed to create a culture that is based on team ethic. It has become natural to the players to do that. So it becomes self-maintaining

because it passes from generation to generation."

The quelling of players' egos was less a problem in Chapman's day. At a time of mass unemployment, the £6 a week paid to footballers was too vast a sum to give away easily. Players, even star players, were more malleable, more liable to bow to authority. Not even a player of the magnitude and character of Alex James was able to escape censure when the Club sensed a lack of effort. Chapman once disciplined his little midfield wizard by booking him a 'cruise' to France. Only when James arrived dockside with his suitcase did he discover it was a working passage on board a very rickety old boat to Bordeaux. Wenger could not dream of such punishments now. "That would be very difficult," he says. "I think I would be the one on the boat." In fact, James, 5ft 6in tall in his boots, would never have made the Wenger criteria: he was too small. The Frenchman has always had rigorous standards and height was one of them. "The player must be tall, strong, explosive, fast, have fantastic co-ordination, quick feet and a quick brain. Bergkamp and Henry, both have fantastic brains. How quickly they respond to situations. At the end of the day, it is intelligence that makes the difference."

An intelligent man feels all the more insulted when his best work is foiled by cheating. It means no amount of intellect, ingenuity or work ethic can beat a system unfairly tilted against you. Wenger found himself in that position in Monaco when Olympique Marseille were recurring French champions thanks to bribery and corruption, led by the former politician and president of the club, Bernard Tapie. Exposure of L'Affaire VA-OM, as it was known (VA for Valenciennes FC and OM for Marseille), in which Valenciennes players allowed Marseille to secure a League title-winning match between the two sides and rest players ahead of their Champions League Final in 1993 – engulfed French football in the early 1990s, sickening Wenger, who held the game so dear and perhaps explaining why Marseille were the dominant force during his seven-year reign in the principality. Having won the Championship with Monaco in 1988, he never again achieved the same success, although he did win the French equivalent of the FA Cup in 1991. If anything allowed him to leave French football for Japan without so much as a backward glance, it may have been the searing misery of this experience.

"It was annoying," he says. "It was a really bad experience to witness such corruption. You don't sleep at night. No matter what you do, it's all wrong. And once you have suspicion about your own players being involved, it is even more difficult. You have to be careful not to become paranoid, which is very difficult in football. What cured me is that I have a natural optimism about human beings – it is a very important attribute in our job: you have to be positive about other

people. And, of course, there is the punishment of those that cheat. But it is never enough. It was not enough what happened in Italian football in 2006 when several big clubs, including Juventus, were convicted of cheating and bribing referees. I think the punishments should have been much harsher. For instance, when you know how long they have cheated, they should be stripped of all the trophies they have won in those years."

Wenger is passionate and adamant on the subject, and yet, on a smaller scale, he acknowledges the common little fraudulences of his own players on the pitch – the dissembling that became popularly known as ‘diving’, for example. "I cannot say that Arsenal are not guilty. But I still think we have to fight against it. The price to pay when you are a big club is that your minor incidents became major. We did fight against it and it is much better. Our disciplinary record became much better. Too good." He smiles, because every football manager needs a little venom in the overall ‘Va-Va-Voom’. "I feel that football has changed in England during my time here. It was much more provocative and physical at the beginning of my time at Highbury than at the end. I believe Vieira and Petit were targeted in the early days because they were strong and foreign. And the French, you know, had the reputation of being softies, so the other players wanted to test them. But in these two cases, they got the ‘wrong address’.

"Patrick was a very young boy at that time and was very impulsive, so he over-reacted at times. That’s why we got red cards in those days. I was supportive of him because I understood that a lot of bad tackles on him had not been punished, and I thought that for such a young boy to say nothing at all was very difficult. I always try to support my players to the world outside the Club. Outside I feel you have to keep a united front on good and bad days. It doesn’t mean internally that I always agree with them.

"To the world outside, you can say you have seen a bad performance. When you don’t play well you have to be honest enough to accept that. But you don’t say. ‘The right back was a complete failure’. I don’t forget I am responsible for his performance. I pick him. I have to stand up for that. You have to hold your nerve."

Wenger did hold his nerve, leading to both a revolution in style and an upsurge in trophies. "We wanted to win and win in style. That’s the responsibility I feel big clubs have: to entertain. We have the responsibility to people who pay £50, or more, to watch a game. They deserve to see the best of the best. At least that has to be your ambition. You won’t always realise that ambition. But that’s part of the love and respect you show the fans. In 2002, we played the football of dreams. Yes ... everybody was at his peak and had the



hunger, desire, intelligence to be successful."

The football that Arsenal were producing at the start of the 2002/2003 season propelled Wenger into a pronouncement that he would not be allowed to forget. He said he thought it was possible for a team to play a whole season undefeated. How people scoffed. And how frustrated he became when the promise was unfulfilled, with a string of bad results in the dying throes of the season. Years later, Wenger still professes unease at the perceived injustice. "I felt in some games it was completely unfair the way we lost," he says. "In one match we were kicked off the park without the referee interfering at all. I felt that we lost the title in 2003 and justice was not done."

There was an element, perhaps, of ungraciousness when he maintained that Arsenal were a better team than Manchester United, the newly crowned champions. When Sir Alex claimed the same thing a year later, Wenger smiled and merely replied, "We all think we have the prettiest wife at home." It was a remark that may have bamboozled Sir Alex into thinking Lady Ferguson's looks had been brought into the argument, but it was not the case. It was another of Wenger's clever analogies that sometimes flew over the heads of their targets.

He has become known over the years for his high-profile disagreements with not only Sir Alex but also Jose Mourinho, of Chelsea. The rows, when they have become personal, have irked him. "If only football is involved, you always forget about it," he says. "But when it is personal, no. I didn't need to talk about it. I ignore people, that's all."

On a human level, it seems a shame that there was not a greater bond between them, each locked into such a prestigious club. "Well, yes, but the job makes you want to be lonely a little bit. You have to make decisions on your own: I am used to it. Like everybody, I want to be successful. I would rather be successful than popular. But I also think that my relationship with Sir Alex has become better over the years ... perhaps we are both mellowing." Perhaps also, they have had a common enemy in the Chelsea manager? "Maybe," Wenger agrees with one of his mischievous smiles.

In May 2003, as Arsenal's startling early-season form became bogged down in heavy tackles and a loss of momentum, Wenger was visibly nursing a sense of grievance. "Old Vinegar Face", he was called by Sir Alex and he freely admits his faults. "I am not a perfect man. But I did not think we had been treated fairly by the referees. Players like Sol Campbell were sent off and they did not deserve it. That is why I was not so gracious in defeat. But that is the time when you feel it is a good opportunity to show your strength. You don't lie down, you don't feel sorry for yourself: you come back even stronger. This we did the following year – the unbeaten year. In my view, that was the biggest year of any English

football team ever.

"To play the whole season unbeaten, people don't realise what it means. Every Saturday, every Wednesday, playing in the European Cup as well. You go home, you are tired, go to Newcastle, go to Liverpool, go to Manchester ... you cannot afford to lose one single game in the whole season. Nobody has done it in the modern time. People thought the pressure of not losing would take its toll mentally, but I tried to focus the team more on trying to improve our game and forget about the result. Victory came naturally. It was a side-effect of playing well. The anxiety of defeat wasn't there any more. We came quite close to losing a few times, but the closest was the first game of the whole 49 games when we played Manchester United. There was a penalty in the last minute which was missed." This mention might have been mischief on Wenger's part; the infamous game at Old Trafford resulted in disciplinary procedures against both teams after angry scenes on that occasion, and the fact that Arsenal's celebrations after Ruud van Nistelrooy's penalty miss were considered ungentlemanly. As irony would have it, the run that began with United ended 49 games later – at the hands, and feet, of United, too. It was a rough, tough match. Defeat at Old Trafford ended the affair with invincibility, but it was a magnificent, ground-breaking, legendary run while it lasted. As a final flourish to the 2004/2005 season, Arsenal won the FA Cup Final – beating their fierce rivals, United, on penalties.

"Like on Everest, you come back down to earth again and then you say to your players, 'Come on, climb back up there again'. They need a little breather, then they return. But it took us some time to recover from the season before." The manager, too. "You have to be human. I try not to lose my temper beside the pitch because I know I am an excessive man. In fact, I control my temper so well because I'm afraid of the way I can lose it. What is terrible is that I come from a Latin culture and it's instant, over-reaction most of the time. I have realised over the years how much damage you can do to people, or to yourself, with an instant reaction. You can kill somebody in a second by over-reacting. I learnt a lot about control in Japan." And also from his Germanic roots? "That is my opposite and contrary side – this is true. I have had abi-cultural influence at the start of my life."

Such is the history of Alsace, constantly wavering in sovereignty on the Franco-German border, that his grandfather fought for the Kaiser during the First World War. His father fought for the Reich on the Russian front. "Fighting with very little enthusiasm," Wenger adds.

By the time that Wenger was born, on October 22, 1949, Alsace was French again. "I feel French," Wenger says, despite the German antecedents, his sojourn in Japan – which he once described as "my ancestral home" – and reaching the

peak of his career so far, in England, by taking Arsenal to the Champions League Final.

"It was the miracle of the year. For a long part of the season I had the problem of convincing my players how good they were – because we lost Patrick Vieira, Sol was injured, and Cole only played seven games; it was very difficult. And yet I felt we were good enough."

There was also the problem of being short of funds for players, because of the financing of Emirates Stadium. "Yes, but we anticipated that by bringing in some good young players four or five years ago – Cesc Fabregas, Robin van Persie, José Antonio Reyes and, more lately, Flamini, Eboué, Philippe Senderos ... not household names, but what is good in life is that before you get a name, you have no name. That doesn't mean you have no quality. That's what I tried to convince my players of – that they can make a name [for themselves]."

"You can always try to convince somebody they are good, but if it is not confirmed by results it doesn't work. That's why I tried to find a great result. And I did. I think the Real Madrid match, the first leg away in the Champions League, was the result that convinced them. It was the turning point of the season – the moment when they thought, 'We are not as bad as we think we are. We are good'. Suddenly everybody looked at us differently. Everybody was convinced by the way we played the game and thought, 'OK, Arsenal are a good team'. It's strange: when you feel vulnerable, you are vulnerable, but when you feel strong, you are strong."

"The team had nothing to lose that night at Real. But I was convinced when they left the dressing room that night that they would win. They were motivated without being inhibited. When you see the first 10 minutes, it should have been 3-0 to Arsenal. Thierry's goal was one of his greatest in the circumstances. Ronaldo chased back on him, Thierry just shrugged him off."

Wenger looks distant for a moment, while he imagines the goal in his mind. "It was a great night. I was so happy. It was one of my greatest nights with Arsenal because I felt that was just what we needed. But nobody had expected it against the Galacticos of Zinedine Zidane and all."

"Then we played well against Juventus at Highbury in the next round. It was great for me to see that. We realised what we had done against Madrid was not an accident; it was just a confirmation of our quality." The significant moment that many people identified was Vieira, now subdued in his Juve shirt, being hauled to his feet after a collision with a smiling Fabregas, his replacement in the Arsenal line-up. Both players were Wenger prodigies, but on that occasion, there was only one winner. "I didn't speak to Patrick that night, no, because I know how much he hates to lose," Wenger says. "I feel, as well, it is part of respect to

leave people alone. But he can take a lot of consolation in that we will never forget him at Arsenal. He is a big part of the history of the Club. A tremendous part."

Vieira, young and unhappy in Italy, was Wenger's first superstar-to-be signing in 1996. Bergkamp, underused and unhappy in Italy, was already on the premises. There followed Petit, unhappy at Monaco; Pires, unhappy at Olympique Marseilles; Henry, unhappy and underplayed at Juventus; Nicolas Anelka, needless to say, unhappy at Paris St Germain. All of them bought relatively cheaply, rejuvenated and reassigned to starring roles at Highbury. Three of those players – Bergkamp, Henry and Pires – were still at Arsenal as the Uefa Champions League Final approached. Both legs of Arsenal's semi-final against Villarreal, of Spain, were disappointing, but at least the game at Highbury was enlivened by the appearance of a squirrel that invaded the corner of Jens Lehmann's penalty area. The away leg proved ultra-cautious – the squirrel had definitely been more adventurous.

"We looked paralysed," Wenger says. Possibly by the weight of history stacked against them. No Arsenal team had ever gone so far before. "It is difficult to explain why. The closest we came before was when we lost to Chelsea in the last minute of the quarter-final in 2004. Before that, I felt we were not completely ready, and when we played those games at Wembley, it was a strange feeling. The fact is, we have reached the Champions League/European Cup Final once in the whole history of the Club. It is difficult to create a team who can do it, who have the perfect form and uninjured players just at the right moment. But we were 13 minutes away from winning in Paris, so we were close. I think on the night we just paid for a lack of experience. If there had been 11 v 11 on the pitch, then I think that we would have had a very good chance to win the game against Barcelona. We were not at all overawed."

However, history records that Lehmann was sent off before the 20th minute and Arsenal had to play three-quarters of the match with only 10 men. Wenger lets out a deep sigh as he remembers. "If I was a neutral supporter, I would say, 'No, Lehmann should not have been sent off. It should have stayed 11 v 11'. And I still feel that their first goal was offside. That is a regret, of course. To concede an offside goal when you are 10 v 11 ... but that is the price you have to pay for being there. It took me a week to have normal sleep again – one complete week. You never completely get over it, never forget about it. But you come back to who lives around you, and to being a normal human being again."

Whether his partner, Annie Brosterhous (a former French Olympian basketball player), and their daughter Lia, born in 1997, feel that he has ever been a 'normal human being', with his well-publicised passion for football-video

viewing day and night, is open to interpretation. But at least he never kicks the cat. "No, because we have no cat," he says. "But you think about a defeat like that – how you could have done differently." It is, very definitely, haunting.

At the end of the match he was so enraged by disappointment, by the thwarted proximity of his 'Holy Grail', that some of his comments were deemed ungracious at the time. It was probably no more than disgust at losing and the inability, in the furnace of the moment, to disguise it. "I did not feel ungracious. I said nothing against Barcelona. They played well without being exceptional. But if you mean that I was upset to concede an offside goal, I prefer to be ungracious." And he smiles.

Wenger mellowed a little at the World Cup that followed, held in Germany. "When I was at the World Cup, I realised how popular Arsenal players and their game had become all over the world. People from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Ivory Coast – everywhere – came up to congratulate the players," he says. This worldwide appreciation society would prove handy for recruiting new players. He agrees. "Everybody dreams of being Thierry Henry."

In one crucial sense, Wenger's own dreams came true regarding the great French striker: he stayed with Arsenal. After almost a whole season of speculation, Henry decided to remain with Arsenal right after losing the Champions League Final, despite the obvious attractions of joining the same Barcelona side that had just beaten them. "He made that decision on the night," Wenger says. "He told me on the flight home. I don't know what really decided him, but it was very happy news; the only good news of the night. I had tried to persuade him, but I left him as well. I explained to him why he should stay, but I left him completely alone because he should not have felt manipulated by me at all, and it should be a deliberate choice by him at some stage. In the end, he had to stay because he was convinced it was the right place for him."

One of the ways in which Wenger undoubtedly helped to persuade Henry to stay with Arsenal was his capability of making individuals feel special, even within the parameters of a team. Of Vieira he once said: "We want him to be at Arsenal forever." Of Bergkamp: "A player who gets close to perfection." And of Henry: "You could say we play for him in a way." Yet Wenger was also the manager who insisted upon the organic whole of the team. "What you have to get out of every player is a servant for the team's vision and goals," he says. Somehow he has persuaded world superstars to sign up to the image of themselves as masters and servants simultaneously.

"Well, yes," Wenger says thoughtfully. "I said that about Thierry because he finishes the job. I feel the striker and the goalkeeper are special jobs. They have a high responsibility. They are always under pressure. If they miss chances, the

strikers are victimised so they are more fragile, more exposed. When you are a player, you think, 'Me! Me! Me!'. When you are a manager, you think, 'You! You! You!'.

Wenger says that he fell in love with Highbury more than he imagined he ever would during his time at the stadium. "There was a soul in that place you could never forget – there was something there that made it magic. As proud as I am of Emirates Stadium, I loved Highbury as much. There was something there that made you feel like family. You were close to everybody: the pitch was small. Not one stand looked exactly like another one. You felt the whole history of the Club was in there, from the Herbert Chapman statue to the boardroom, wherever you went."

Wenger knew about Chapman. "He was an amazing manager. Always 20 years ahead of his time; I will read all about him one day." In so many ways, Wenger would find himself reading about a man with the same ideas and philosophy as himself. They worked on the same premises but in different worlds. Chapman once received a letter from one of his players saying: "Dear Sir, I don't think I shall bother turning out tomorrow." One cannot imagine one of Wenger's professionals committing such a thought to paper: he chooses his players so carefully. Yet so too did Chapman. He rarely made mistakes in the transfer market, possessing, just like Wenger, an uncanny eye for talent and the ability to reshape a player for the benefit of the team.

Chapman pounced on the ability of the 17-year-old Cliff 'Boy' Bastin, in 1929; the player's Arsenal goalscoring record would be broken by Ian Wright in 1997, nearly 60 years later. Chapman also decided to move the inside forward to play out on the wing, yet Bastin was utterly converted, in every way. "He possessed an almost hypnotic power of convincing," the player recalled. "By the time I left his office, I'd been an established outside left for years."

Highbury rarely rang to the sound of the two managers' anger. Both men preferred a quiet, pointed word rather than a public rant. Yet their authority was absolute. "Do you smoke or drink," was Chapman's first question to 17-year-old Eddie Hapgood, the former milkman from Kettering Town, who Chapman turned into an England international. Only Alex James, the London jazz-club aficionado, was allowed a looser rein. It was noted of Chapman that "he never spoilt nor allowed others to spoil his players with too much praise, but struck a balance between encouragement and discipline."

Chapman expounded his vision for the Club when he was appointed in 1925: "To make Arsenal Football Club one of the best football clubs from all points of view. To employ, without exception, the very best type of player to represent the Club. Above all, he must be a gentleman both on and off the field. He must be a

clever player, who can think out attractive, constructive tactics and he must be wholeheartedly enthusiastic and keen to make progress in the game." Although the name attached to these sentiments was H. Chapman, it could just as easily be A. Wenger.

Chapman, amusingly, used to suffer acute agonies on the touchline watching the team perform. More similarities. Only visually did the men diverge. Chapman was robust to the point of rotund, and nicknamed "Football's Napoleon". Napoleon? The right nationality for Wenger, but absolutely not the right build.

Wenger was never one of those managers at Highbury who sought to veil the Chapman bust, unequal to the visions of success that it conjured in his mind. He enjoyed delving into Arsenal's history, not least for entertainment purposes. "I can show you a videotape – a fantastic tape – where you see the team-talk of the Arsenal manager the day before a game in the 1950s. All the players are sitting in the dressing room with cigarettes burning and you don't see them at all well because there's so much smoke." He laughs, fairly uproariously, at the incredible scene. "They also had a drink. Scotch. It is amazing. I showed it here to the players. They were laughing, too."

Wenger's sense of humour, contrary to his sometimes severe appearance, is highly evolved. He says that had he not become a football manager, he would have wanted to enter international life of another kind. "Politics or diplomat, something like that." The scene at the UN would be a wonder to behold. "I know exactly what I would say: 'Where did the bomb go? I didn't see it!'"

Wenger's greatest Highbury moment? "Let's choose the first one, the first title against Everton when we won 4-0 in 1998. Adams scored a goal becoming of Franz Beckenbauer. That was great because it showed I could win in England. When you win a Championship it is not always programmed to be 4-0 at home on such a nice spring day. If you had made a film you could not have organised it in a better way. It was all just magnificent. It became very emotional. Then you control yourself again.

"Yet the last day at Highbury was an exceptional day, too. We needed Spurs to lose and us to win. At half-time we were drawing 2-2 against Wigan. I don't really remember what I said in the dressing room, something like, 'You want to give absolutely everything in the second half. Go out here, at this stadium, win this game. There is no other possible way than slaughtering Wigan in the second half'. It was all fantastic in the end. Spurs lost to West Ham, we secured a Champions League place for the future of the Club and we moved to Emirates Stadium on a positive note.

"There were no tears at the end of the game – not at the final whistle because

I was very anxious about the result at West Ham and that match was still playing. But I was emotional after the game. Delighted. Everything went right on the day. That just tells you that Highbury was a lucky place – made for history. Somewhere in our minds we were all thinking, ‘We kept this place safe and until the very last day, we were doing the right things for the history of Highbury’. Like a story, it had a happy ending."

And the worst Highbury moment? "The defeat by Chelsea in the last minute of the Champions League quarter-final. We didn't get so far for years and that last-minute goal was like a knife. That was a bad moment."

Wenger is accused in some quarters of an anti-English bias, despite the fact that he has lived happily in England since 1996. "I can prove this is not true by the fact that we are scouting everywhere and we get more positive reports from abroad than England. The relation between price and quality is better abroad and we had limited finances in the years leading up to the move to Emirates Stadium."

Upstairs at the training base, the chef has discussed the fact that some players had never seen, nor tasted, a variety of vegetables. "It's true," Wenger says. "Some come from quite poor backgrounds so they do not get the best food always. I was lucky in the village where I grew up that we had our own garden, with home-grown potatoes and tomatoes. We were organic before the word was used. My grandfather was a farmer. I used to work in the fields, picking potatoes, corn, tobacco."

Tobacco, Arsène? "It was a good way of surviving at the time. It was hard work as well, because you had to work at night, to hang it up to dry. Many times I worked very long days, 12 hours, when I was only 10, 11, and 12 years old. When I was a kid of 14 I was already a man. Now boys are 25 and you are still saying, ‘Isn't it time you left home?’"

"But I like England. I have a very strong Anglo-Saxon side in me. The English, like me, have a lot of contradictions. They are basically very positive people and also sometimes very negative. They are very private, very restricted with their feelings, but like to invade other people's privacy. I don't watch *Big Brother*. It is contrary to what I believe, completely. It is the wrong side of modern society, that people who do nothing become quickly famous with no merit at all other than sitting in front of the camera. I don't like that fake side. To become a great footballer you have to have great motivation, great dedication, great talent, great stamina, and yet just being in front of a camera makes you considered successful. What is quite terrible is you see the pools of under 16s who say that what they want to be is ‘famous’. They don't say they want to be a good singer, or footballer, or veterinary student: they just want to be famous."



What kind of target is that in life? If there is not something in life you master well, then three months later it is all finished.

"I love the FA Cup," he adds, as befits a man who has won it four times from five finals. There was a time when Arsenal supporters could have bought season tickets for the rail journey to Cardiff. Wenger's first memories of the FA Cup began while watching the competition on the communal television in his village's Catholic school. It was a fine example of religion in action and Wenger remains a Catholic in principle. "But I am not very religious. Let's say I believe in all the principles of religion, Catholicism. But I'm not very good to believe in the afterlife and all that kind of thing." Perhaps reincarnation would permit him to come back as a footballer closer to the Beckenbauer ideal? He thinks about this for a moment, then disagrees. "No, I think paradise is just one football pitch."

In the meantime, at London Colney, he has work to do. Work that he has always conducted with missionary zeal and in the company of men, his backroom staff, who he could hardly value more highly. "It is fantastically important to have the right people. I feel that for a manager, his staff is his explanation for success. It tells you a lot about the way that he chooses people, the way he trusts people, his exchanges with people. I am convinced you cannot be successful with bad staff."

At London Colney, there has been a marriage of cultures. "I feel that is part of the richness of the modern world – that people respond differently. You can learn from people of different cultures. They can see things that you can't see. We have a very interesting team. For instance, Pat Rice, my assistant coach, for him it's clear – Arsenal. 'I hate Tottenham'. You get that club culture through Rice. It's really in his heart. He is a very intelligent guy, very honest. Then we have a Croatian..." This is Boro Primorac, a man who began working with Wenger at Cannes and has remained loyally in the Frenchman's camp ever since. Wenger's team also includes a French dietician, blood analyst and nutritionist, Dr Yann Rougier, who has his own research laboratory in France. Among other attributes, the doctor has produced herbal remedies to help improve sexual performance. "Well, that is not what we use him for," Wenger says calmly. "Vitamin supplements – nothing more than that."

On the subject of his training methods, he is rarely expansive. He will only ever say, "They must be natural and all oriented towards football". Yet it well-known that no matter how hard his players have trained, they are absolutely not allowed to trail one piece of mud from the pitches into the immaculate dressing room. This, despite the fact that Wenger is by no means free of having accidents himself. "It's true. I am clumsy," he says. "I don't know why. Maybe sometimes

because your thoughts are elsewhere, you know. A manager is always in the future: the next game, the next game after that. I am speaking to you, but I am thinking about Middlesbrough, or Manchester United as well. I do all kinds of stupid things. But I am not embarrassed. Not at all."

Wenger will never retire from football. "There is no other way but to remain in football. For players it can be in many different ways: as a pundit, or writer, or coach, or scout. But there is no alternative. It is not part of your life. It is your life. You look at all the greatest players in the world – Platini, Beckenbauer, Cruyff: they remain in football. It's terrible to lose your passion. For players, they lose their passion, fame and income at the same time. The money is not a problem for players any more, now they only lose the other two. But that is still fundamental to their life. If you no longer have a target in life it can be very boring. There is nothing more terrible than remorse." Wenger, one would imagine, has no remorse whatsoever for time misspent. "Well, er, I always think I could have done better..." He pauses. "But I could have done much worse, too." So what is his philosophy? "To bring people together to share something, and be happy to do it," he says. "To entertain – be the best of the best. At least that has to be your ambition. That's part of the love and respect you show the people. That is basically what the game is about. It is a sense of achievement. Once you get a team to share these values, they take off: they understand it's more than just about kicking a ball. I expect the players here to stay close forever. I believe that all the big teams who get to the bottom of what football is about stay together for their life. Always. It is one of the strengths of this Club that we are especially good at the responsibility of taking care of the history and values of Arsenal."

However, perhaps more importantly, has he ever eaten a chip? He looks nonplussed for a moment. "What is that?" he asks. A 'French fry', he is told. "Yes, of course, I love them," he says, debunking the myth that the revolution he wrought in the eating habits of English football has been something he religiously adopts himself.

"I come from Alsace where we produce potatoes. I eat potatoes. But I restrict myself. Like all things that you forbid. Once, from time to time, you have to do it." He looks mischievous. "That is my contradiction."

**Sue Mott**

## INTERVIEW

**Two of a kind**

Charlie George and Francesc Fabregas: two outrageous talents separated by 30 years and different footballing eras, but united by a burning desire to play the game

This is how much Arsenal changed. When Charlie George was in his prime in the early 1970s, he smoked in the locker room, nipped brandy before a match, wore floral shirts and platform boots, was cheeky to his elders, gambled on the dogs and horses, went to the pub with the supporters after games, drove a Ford Capri, married his childhood sweetheart, ate burgers in the local Wimpy Bar and made a pop record called *Love Song To My Lady* (although to spare the nation's eardrums it was never released).

Thirty years later, Francesc Fabregas, a youthful midfield maestro of a multi-cultural Arsenal team, has never smoked a cigarette in his life, drinks beer only very occasionally, wears the trendiest clothes, respects his elders, never spends more than £6 a week on the Spanish football pools, has hired a business studies teacher, drives a black Audi TT with GPS and Bluetooth, and adores eating fish.

But, almost word for word, they have shared the same ambition. "All I wanted to do was play football," George says, looking back with hindsight on his ebullient if erratic career, spanning Arsenal, Derby County, Southampton, Nottingham Forest, Australia, America and Hong Kong. "All I want to do is play football," Fabregas says, in explanation of his move from Barcelona's youth team to Arsenal in 2003. Different roots, different language, different century: shared love. Everything and nothing has changed over the past 30 years.

Training, for instance. Charlie trained at Highbury from the age of 11. An Islington schoolboy picked up by the astute Arsenal scouts as a cheeky young lad with potential. "We used to train on Monday and Thursday nights in the old college at Highbury, behind the Clock End, on the old red-ash pitch with a lot of other local lads. We did a few ball skills, nothing too serious. Bit of ball work and games and then we'd inevitably finish up with a mini-match. The Club used to give us half a crown each for our bus fare, which was pretty decent money in those days. Otherwise we used to play football in the streets or the parks. We used to go over to Finsbury Park, sling a couple of bags down for the goals and have a game, five or six a side. We'd meet other boys over there and play them. We didn't know them, but one way or another we'd form a game."

A rough and ready lifestyle, all wrapped up in football. His academic work was, well, just that: academic. Days were less likely to be spent at school than playing truant, occupying himself with sly fags, swigs of beer and small-time

gambling, hiding in the pram shed with a bunch of friends playing dice. On those – fairly rare – occasions when he did go to school, he swiftly found himself in trouble. He remembers being caned by a teacher called Mr Crabtree for yet another transgression of school rules. His mother was so incensed she went up to the school to complain. He also remembers the unimpressed response of the careers officer when young Charlie assured him he was going to become a professional footballer at Arsenal. In the end, he was expelled, but it made little difference. Charlie hadn't been there for two months anyway.

At the age of 15, on the advice of George Male, Arsenal's full-back during the Club's glorious spell in the 1930s, Charlie George became a Highbury apprentice. He had stood on the terraces, first with this father, then with friends. Now he was a player at the Club. It was a dream come true for George.

Fabregas joined Barcelona, the team he loved and supported, at the age of 10. He was already a season ticket-holder, a fan of long standing like his father, grandfather and uncles. Passion for Barca ran in the family, as it did in millions of Catalan families on the Eastern coast of Spain, but Fabregas was one of the extraordinarily talented ones. He was taken in by the great club as a young prospect. Camp Nou, Barcelona's cavernous, iconic stadium, was not just his place of hero worship, it was home.

He was a good student, academically and physically. He never missed training and he never missed school. Days were hectic. "I was from a small town, a fishing port north of Barcelona which was quite far out of the city. So I had to wake up early in the morning, go to school, come back, have lunch, rest a little bit, go running, then a taxi would come to pick up about six of us and take us to training at Barcelona. We would train at 7.30pm, finish at 9.30pm, take a taxi home again to arrive around midnight. Then I would have to do my homework, sometimes to 2am or 3am and wake up early again to go to school. It was like that for five years – really hard. Now when I have to do something really important, I can. Maybe because I have worked so hard when I was young, it is like – how do you say it in English? – my recompense. My reward. But, you know, I enjoyed it. The training and the studies. Motivation was sometimes difficult. But you have to do it. Sometimes when you are young, you think you know everything. But now I realise that my studies were very, very important.

"I never did something like – how do you say? – truant. Maybe sometimes I thought about it, but I knew I would feel bad afterwards. In the end I got all my exams and good grades. I can speak Spanish, Catalan, English, a little bit of French." All would prove useful at Arsenal.

George may have been a scamp, but he was never, ever late for training. He

was irrepressible, but never yobbish. The cheekiest thing he would ever do was advance menacingly on goalkeeper Bob Wilson and ask: "Which way do you want the ball, left, right or through your legs". Invariably it would go exactly as planned, to the annoyance of the exasperated keeper. While others on the Tufnell Park estate where he lived would be out hot-wiring motorbikes for joyrides, George's vices were numerous, but trivial. He wasn't a villain and while he had run-ins with the local police force, there was nothing serious because he was on a mission to be a footballer. His father had played for Clapton Orient, but Arsenal was the love of both their lives.

"I was never in trouble as a schoolboy," Fabregas says. "I was a good student, but I was also a bit cheeky, you know. Who has ever not done anything wrong? No one is a saint, not even Dennis Bergkamp. When I was young, the worst thing I did with my friends was take the thing out of the tyre on a car. I don't know the name but it makes it go 'psssst'. But I didn't steal any cars. No way."

Different boys, same ambitions. George signed as an Arsenal apprentice in 1966, a very fine year for English football. Sammy Nelson, a future first-team colleague, remembers seeing him for the first time: tall, thin and sporting a skinhead haircut. "He looked like a tadpole with his head shaved," the Irishman says.

Apprentices picked up dirty kit in the locker room, cleaned the boots and swept the terraces. In those days they earned less than a fiver a week. Charlie always spent his money in a day, if not within hours – quite an achievement when it cost only a few pence for a pint of light and bitter, often imbibed at a friend's dad's pub, the Royal Arms in Kentish Town. He bought his first suit from Burtons. "Armani didn't exist in those days. The suit was about £15, I think." When finances ran a little low, he would nip the suit into the local pawn shop. "Pawn shop?" Fabregas asks. "What is that?" Something he will never need to know.

"In my last year in Spain I was living with all the Barcelona boys. Three to a room at Nou Camp. It was easier than all the taxis and going home every night. I sat down with my parents and family at 15 and decided it was the right thing to do." He was there for a year, combining studies and football. His mother used to phone and check he was doing his homework, but by then he knew with certainty where his future lay. "My parents were very happy and proud for me to be a footballer because they knew that is what I love. It was always my dream."

Then Arsenal came calling. At first, Fabregas had his doubts. "At Barca we played Arsenal a few months before in a youth tournament and we beat them 5-1. I scored two goals and I was like 'I don't want to go because we are better.'

But then I came here to see the training ground and to talk to Mr Wenger and I saw that Arsenal was a great club. Imagine, you are playing under-16s at Barcelona and then you are talking to a person like Arsène Wenger who is so important in this world of football. It impressed me a lot. They took me all around London. I saw Buckingham Palace and Big Ben. Then they came here to Spain, made me the proposal and I had to think about it. Everyone was so nice. The installations, they were very good. I was talking to the landlady I was supposed to live with and everyone was really kind. I had something in my mind saying: 'Go on, you have to sign because everything is going to be fine.'

"I made my decision. At Barcelona it would have taken me a long time to get into the first team. I was not sure that I would make it to the first team at all, you never know there. It was a risk. But I was really sure this was the best opportunity I could ever get. I knew it was a train I would have to catch. So I caught it."

In 1966 George volunteered to set up the chairs for the heavyweight title fight at Highbury between Muhammad Ali and Henry Cooper. By 1969, he was a little more important than that. He made his first-team debut against Everton at Highbury in August that year and Arsenal, with the vast ranks of the George family among the spectators, lost 0-1. The Club had agreed to pay him £80 per week and he was sick before the match, owing to nerves, just as he was before every subsequent game he played for Arsenal. When he was transferred to Derby in 1975, the sickness ceased and never returned.

"I honest to God don't know why I was sick before games. Probably because I was playing for my local team. It stopped when I went to Derby. I relaxed. Some people think I played some of my best football up there. But then football always was a simple game to me. I think football is an easy game complicated by coaches. There were no foreign players in the dressing room, just English, Scots, Welsh and Irish, and there were no rules about drinking. Obviously you knew not to get drunk a couple of days before games but there was nothing to stop you going out on a Saturday, or a Sunday or a Monday. No one said: 'You can't do this, you can't do that'. Even with Bertie Mee being such a disciplinarian, I don't remember any rules like that. Only being on time for training. And I was always early. I was never fined for being late for training."

Fabregas says: "The first game I saw at Highbury was against Inter Milan and we lost 3-0 in the Champions League, so it was not a good start." The Spaniard sat and watched the match with his agent. "When I made my debut, it was against Rotherham United in the Carling Cup. It was ... I don't know how to explain. The people, the stadium, the grass was so good. I know that if I had made my debut in another stadium, it would have been a different feeling."



"My very first game for Arsenal, though, was against Coventry City, away, in the U17s team. My family came and it was freezing cold, but I felt good the way I played, so they were happy. It was a big move, to change countries when you are 16, when you have to live on your own and your parents are not coming with you. But you mature quicker than other boys of your age." He also had the example of Bergkamp and Thierry Henry, two professionals of immaculate habits and proper attention to training.

George used to train five days a week. "We had a lot of fit guys. We trained very hard, especially under Don Howe. We used to do a lot of shuttles, lap sprinting, terrace work and then we'd go over to the gym for a five-a-side game. Players don't come to the stadium now. But in those days we used to run up to the top of the North Bank, up the steps and then straight back to the middle. We'd run up to the top of the South Bank, straight back to the middle." Even injured players were never spared the rod. They would report for duty at 8.30am and stay at the Club until the rush hour, meanwhile (injury permitting) performing endless sit-ups, weighttraining sessions and circuits of the Highbury gym. The result was a team supremely confident in its fitness. Sometimes Howe, the trainer, would instruct the squad to go on a cross-country run. George always performed well in these tests of stamina. Not least because he would find some suitable hedge behind which to hide while the rest of the team ran on. He would idle his time away for a while and rejoin the group, well up the field, when they lumbered past on the way back. He escaped admonition. No one ever grassed. They probably admired his audacity. "If there was a short cut to something, I'd try to find it."

The very first time he had trained with Arsenal as a schoolboy, he had been expecting to train with the ball. No such thing. Under the eye of the trainer, Ernie Walley, the players were told to run laps of the pitch. Charlie managed 20 before he was sick. As for technical training, George was already a player of charismatic skill, audacious in trickery as he was in personality. Arsenal gave him the strength to pull off the wizardry, such as the night of February 17, 1971, at Manchester City in the fifth round of the FA Cup – on the way to winning the Double – when he scored two goals in the pouring rain on a bog of a pitch.

"In our dressing room in those days, we all did our own thing. Each to his own. We didn't warm up on the pitch like they do now. We used to warm up in the dressing room area. It's completely different now. It's a wonder we never got more muscle pulls than we did. We did a few sit-ups, a few step-ups. Peter Storey would probably be kicking the ball up against a wall over and over again. Frank [McLintock] was geeing everyone up. Peter Simpson would be having a couple of fags and a read of the paper in the toilet ... George Armstrong was

very quiet, Sammy Nelson was the joker – he was one of the funniest guys I've ever known. I'd say he was one of my closest friends.

"Time off? If I had a pound for every horse I'd backed at the bookies, I'd be a millionaire by now. And I used to enjoy dog racing. The local track was Harringay; sometimes we went to Ally Pally [Alexandra Palace, North London]. And I enjoyed horse racing. Drinking? I think I started drinking gin, which wasn't a good idea. Then vodka, lager... That's how the game was in those days. When I went to Derby, I used to have a cup of tea and a couple of brandies before I went out. There was always brandy and scotch in the Arsenal dressing room for you to have a nip before you went out."

Modern Arsenal do not favour cross-country runs any more. "Training is always with the ball," Fabregas says. "It's physical, but always with the ball. Just running? Oh, no, no, no. We play a lot of games, do a lot of passing the ball very quickly, defending, we play little games of five on two. It has made me improve a lot. When they make you play against players like Dennis and Thierry, you have to do your best all the time. You will improve because everything you do, you will do it 100 per cent."

By the time Fabregas joined Arsenal, all training had moved to London Colney: 143 acres of beautiful Hertfordshire countryside, with state-of-the-art facilities and, more pointedly, 10 immaculate pitches. The training centre itself, conceived and overseen by Wenger, is one of the best in the country. So much attention to so many details have gone into the creation of London Colney: the colours on the wall are muted, the floors are heated and natural light spills in through glass ceilings. Apprentices are no longer expected to clean boots and sweep floors, these days the sweeping is done by contract cleaners.

Even the boot room was a revelation to Fabregas when he arrived: no mud, no grass, no piles of muddy football boots kicked into a corner. Instead, neat racks of boots on hooks, some of them as slender and light as slippers. Freddie Ljungberg's, for instance, looked like dancing shoes. Bergkamp had 10 pairs in a row. Philippe Senderos preferred a traditional pair: thick, strong and black. In the gym the windows look out on a small lake, surrounded by reeds and wild iris so although television is not allowed while players work out, they can watch the wildlife through the glass. Inspired by Wenger's sojourn in Japan, the atmosphere is a curious cross between beauty, tranquillity and contentment. Fabregas adapted seamlessly to this world of high endeavour: even as a teenager, he was a dedicated professional. Even in his leisure time. "I read books – action and comedy, I have a PlayStation, but by 11pm most nights I'm sleeping."

Lunch in the canteen in George's day featured steak and kidney pudding, apple pie and custard. "When we were kids we used to have a steak for the pre-

match meal. I used to have a bit of steak and toast. Later, we went on to fruit and cornflakes and poached eggs. Then after that, fish came in, didn't it? After training on a Friday, the team would go and sit in the Wimpy and have a burger in there. It's all changed a hell of a lot. For a start we'd mix with the supporters more in our day. Personally, I would go down the pub after games. People would say 'Oh, you were crap today' or 'You played well'. They'd tell you how it was because they were your friends and friends don't lie. All my friends were supporters."

"My diet? I eat a lot of pasta with tomato sauce," Fabregas says. "And then fish. The best is when we go to our hotel before games and they give us potatoes, fish, chicken, pasta, eggs. I love it. But I have to admit that sometimes when I have a day off I like to go to the doughnut shop. When we play on a Saturday at home, after the game I go there and it's like a party – a doughnuts party – because you can see all the cars parked there and everyone eating their doughnuts inside their cars. It's like a discotheque. I like the boxes with six to 12 different doughnut toppings.

"I have smoked, like, one cigarette in my life. No, not one whole cigarette. I once had one puff. It was the day of my Confirmation in Spain. There is a tradition in my family that as soon as you get confirmed you can have one puff. Everyone did it in my family. So I did it, too, but I didn't like it. I didn't take the smoke in, I blew it out instead. I don't drink either. Water, coke and orange juice, that's what I like best. When I go out, of course, I have a beer or something like that. But I don't go out a lot because I don't have time. The most beers I have ever drunk would be one day in the summer with my friends. Maybe I had five, something like that. It was just one night and I felt bad afterwards. But I can remember everything, so it wasn't that bad."

George says: "It amused me when José Antonio Reyes said he was having a hard time learning English at Arsenal That's because nobody speaks it," he jokes. "But I don't care where our players come from now, as long as they're good. It's a global game, isn't it? Languages? When you play football, it's a universal language. Good luck to the modern player – and their earnings. When we won the Double in 1971, we were on £150-£200 a week, with bonuses on top. I wouldn't say I was famous either. What's fame? Being recognised in the street? It didn't make any difference to me. I like to think I was just a spectator who jumped over the railing from the terraces and played.

"People say I should have been a lot better than I was, but I've got no regrets. I just used to do what I felt like. I dressed how I liked, had my hair how I liked. It amazes me how my hair had anything to do with football. When you see players now they've got dyed hair, Mohicans, ponytails, hairbands. Is that really

any better than me having long hair?"

Life on the modern Arsenal team bus is highly technological: the players sit wearing their iPods, with their all-singing mobiles to hand. So what did Charlie George and the other Arsenal players take on the long coach trips up to Newcastle and Manchester, which included stops at service stations for bags of chips. George thinks for a while? "Twenty fags and a packet of cards, probably," he says.

**Sue Mott**

## INTERVIEW

**Seriously competitive**

**Jens Lehmann may occasionally have cut a controversial figure, but there's no disputing the enormous impact the German goalkeeper has made since his arrival at Arsenal**

"Who are you here to talk to?" asks Arsène Wenger at the Arsenal training ground.

Jens, he is told. "Ah," he says, breaking into a meaningful smile. "A very high subject."

High as in he's one of the greatest goalkeepers in the world, famed for his fierce concentration for Arsenal and Germany, his glory-mongering penalty saves and his tenacious, sometimes livid, guardianship of his goalmouth. High as in 6ft 3in. High as in his contribution to Arsenal's stunningly unexpected run in the Champions League during the Club's final season at Highbury.

Jens Lehmann, perhaps more than any other player – even the beautiful outfield artists in front of him – hauled Arsenal to their first ever Champions League Final in Paris on May 14, 2006. How apt that in Highbury's last season an event so profoundly wonderful should unfold before the faithful and reveal Lehmann as the star. For 835 minutes he kept a clean sheet – from March 22, 2005, when Bayern Munich's Hasan Salihamidzic netted against him in a Champions League quarter-final match, until September 2006, when Hamburg's Boubacar Sanogo scored a consolation 89th-minute goal in Arsenal's new European campaign. Such fabulous parsimony helped carry Arsenal all the way to the final of Europe's most glittering prize. There, with terrible irony, Lehmann became the first player ever to be sent off in the Champions League showpiece, lasting just 18 minutes before a professional foul on Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o saw the referee send him, grim-faced and sickened, from the fray.

How do you bring up a subject like that with a man whose on-field demeanour is not exactly the definition of sunny? By mentioning first that magnificent penalty save against Juan Román Riquelme of Villarreal in the 89th minute of the semi-final, second leg. Believe it or not, he's cross about that one as well. "Well, it wasn't a penalty. It wasn't justified. So I was angry in the first place. But I had watched Riquelme in the home game and the away game so obviously I thought I knew which way he was going to go, from his body movement also. So I went there and fortunately he put it there." In fact, Riquelme had a disappointing game. "Ah, pshawwww. I didn't care. I was just lucky that he put the ball where I was going and then I went on with the game because there were a couple of minutes to go. All the other players came up to

me and wanted to cheer, but I am not the kind of guy who likes to cheer before it's over."

This is magnificent, vintage Lehmann. Never one to showboat, never one to be overoptimistic. Jens Gerhard Lehmann perhaps never expected to be a superstar, especially not back in 1993 when he made an infamous 45-minute appearance for Bayer Leverkusen. During that first half he conceded three goals from the "howler" menu and fled the stadium on a tram instead of waiting for the team bus. But those days were long gone by the time he stood firm and furious for the Arsenal in the greatest European Cup run of their history. "I have to be the most concentrated human being on Earth during matches. That's why I can't tell you what was going on in my brain. During the whole game you have to be on that concentration level and it's difficult to describe afterwards. The experience is so intense that the downside is that you forget it.

"It is not true in every game. I would like that, but unfortunately I'm human and I can't do it. But when I'm up for a game, like those European ties, most of the time I'm quite good. But it is always a team performance; I haven't done it by myself. I was not really driven by the clean sheets that much, but by two things: one, I wanted to go to this final – indeed, I wanted to win it – and two, to gain the number one spot in Germany."

Tall and slim, Lehmann seems uneasily telescoped into his chair. He enjoys inquiries about as much as he enjoys standing toe to toe with Chelsea's Didier Drogba in his penalty area. He is wary rather than unfriendly, quietly spoken but definitely unafraid of controversy: after all, this is a man who holds the Bundesliga record of five dismissals for a goalkeeper. But he did not shrink from facing his personal history, even the Champions League Final trauma. "Unfortunately, these things happen in life. Probably we celebrated a little too much after the semifinals – especially me. Perhaps it was fate because I saved that penalty against Riquelme and made sure we went to the final, and then the final turned out against me. It's still a big disappointment, but it drives me on. Probably I should have stayed a little more in my box when Eto'o attacked. But then he would have gone past me and scored anyway. The bottom line is disappointment about the way the referee made his decision and ended my personal destiny."

Some players would have slunk away to the dressing room. Not Lehmann. Born and bred in the Ruhr Valley in the heart of Germany's steel region, the Arsenal keeper displayed an impressive strength of mind. "I was sitting in the stands. My sons, six and 10, were sitting on my lap." Did that help him? "Well, no. It was still very disappointing," he says with endearing frankness. As bad as that was, his salvation came within a month with the 2006 World Cup in his



hometown. Having claimed the number one goalkeeping place over his arch-rival Oliver Kahn, he played with distinction throughout the tournament until two late goals by Italy knocked Germany out in the semi-finals. His greatest moment came in the quarter-final match, in Berlin, when he had to face the wily Argentine penalty-takers at the end of a 1-1 draw. The South Americans had been the most inspired, creative and dangerous team in the tournament up to that point, but Lehmann made two critical penalty saves, from Roberto Ayala and Esteban Cambiasso, then watched with dawning happiness as his team-mates efficiently converted all four penalties required to win.

Yet there was more to it than that. Lehmann's well-known prowess in penalty shoot-outs was enhanced by the fact that he had been given a set of notes about the Argentine penalty takers. He had kept the notes folded in his right sock. When the time came to use them, he read them with studious attention. With Cambiasso preparing for his strike, Lehmann studied his notes even harder despite the fact that the advancing Argentine wasn't mentioned in them. It was a psychological master-stroke: Cambiasso faltered and Germany went through.

"Unfortunately, we did not get to the end, to the final, so you are always asking yourself what you could have done better." But against Argentina, it is necessary to remind him, he had played like a god. Lehmann laughs. "I think He helped me." Then he adds, unnecessarily to a citizen of England who has only painful memories of shoot-outs: "But, as well as that, I think all of the German penalty-takers who scored in the shoot-out. That is a strength."

He smiles and says: "I'm sorry. When you know your team-mates are good at scoring and they know the goalkeeper is good at saving, you are ahead of the others, in this case the Argentines. A penalty shoot-out is a strange situation: a lot of the time when it goes to penalties, it is the underdogs that win, perhaps because somehow the favourite team is aware they have failed to win in normal time and the psychological advantage somehow switches to the other side."

This sounds remarkably like the situation in the 2005 FA Cup Final when Lehmann again had been the best Arsenal player on the pitch as Manchester United marauded round his goal in Cardiff. Somehow the score remained 0-0 until the final whistle when the dreaded shoot-out was enacted. Roy Carroll, the United goalkeeper, enjoyed multiple pep talks from his team-mates; Lehmann simply lay down on the pitch and concentrated. His team knew better than to fill his head with suggestions. "That's how I do it," he says. Lehmann then stood up, went in goal and made the one crucial save, against Paul Scholes, that won Arsenal the FA Cup.

When he arrived in London, earmarked as a replacement for the unflappable David Seaman, the German was already going on 34. After nearly 10 years at

Schalke, one abortive half season at AC Milan (consisting of a mere five appearances) and a return to Germany with Borussia Dortmund, he made his greatest impact on world football at an age when most outfield players are retiring.

By the time the World Cup came along, he was 36. "It was the greatest experience of my life. To play the World Cup in my home country. The reception we got was just amazing. We didn't win it, but we created such a fantastic atmosphere. There was such a connection between the supporters, the country and us. But there were a lot of lucky ingredients, when you consider the weather and way we played. It was enough to make people happy those four weeks."

Even his nemesis, Kahn, the goalkeeper he had deposed to make his way into the German team, seemed happy. Lehmann's much-publicised, insult-trading rivalry with the Bayern Munich goalkeeper had been a feature of Germany's international history, but posterity recorded that prior to the vital penalty shoot-out against Argentina, Kahn was on the pitch to wish him luck. "People wrote about the nice gesture he made before the penalty shoot-out: he shook my hands and wished me well. I don't think he secretly hoped I let them all in! Somehow he must have realised this was not going to be his World Cup. He had a very successful World Cup 2002, and you can't always have that again. Sometimes it's someone else's turn."

In the eyes of many experts, Lehmann – at a relatively late stage in his long career – had proved himself the best keeper in the world. "Me? Oh, no, no. You can't say that. I can't judge myself in that way. I just know I had a fantastic season."

Yet no one needs to look far too far to find out the reason why. Patrick Vieira, Lehmann's former captain and team-mate, for one, believes that the German's competitive streak has been one factor behind his sustained good form. "Ask him why he is such a bad loser," Vieira had joked when questioned earlier in Milan. Lehmann laughs when he hears the Frenchman's words. "Why? Because I'm not used to losing. I belong to a generation of footballers who found losing badly affected their personal life. Financially you suffered, your reputation suffered, your whole situation suffered. Nowadays players have money before they have actually won something. I grew up in a different way. Saving goals put bread on the table."

His competitiveness is evident: this is the man who always arrives first to Arsenal training, a thorough professional in every aspect of his work. "I don't know why I am so competitive. I had a good upbringing in a nice part in the Ruhr valley – it's very industrial area, but where we lived was nice. My parents were normal. My mother, fortunately, never had to work. My father was a

salesman. Probably I was driven because I saw all this wealth next to me.

"I do sometimes ask myself about that motivation, where it comes from. My parents never played football and never really supported me. They said: 'You are not allowed to play more than once a week because of school'. That was key, I think, in my development. If you are forbidden something, you want to do it more. I played for club teams, the school sometimes. I wasn't the best young goalkeeper, but I was the only one who believed in himself. Even at the age of 14, when nobody believed in me, I kept on working. By 17, I was one of the best at that age. Part of the reason was that I didn't have distractions. I had a girlfriend up to the age of 15 and then we broke up. I just concentrated on football after that." This paints Lehmann in a whole new light, lovelorn and turning to football for solace. He demurred. "I probably just did not get the woman I was chasing," he said with a smile. "And I didn't want to take the other ones."

He definitely did not fulfil the traditional characteristics of a romantic hero. For one thing, he seemed to have quite a temper. He quietly disagrees with this evaluation, as well. "If you have noticed, I never lose it completely. Did you see me conceding a red card or yellow card? In the final, yes, but that was for a professional foul, not for losing my temper. I do admit I get into trouble a lot. This was because when I first came to England everybody was laughing about my style. Now I see other goalkeepers copying my style. Fortunately, the referees are more protective now, so fouls on keepers are more rare. Before they didn't, that's why I had to complain to opponents and to referees. It sometimes gave the impression of me being a little bit of a nasty player then."

Of course, Lehmann's formative years were spent in continental football where the referees traditionally offered far greater protection to goalkeepers than their English counterparts. He suffered a culture shock on arrival and never quite seemed able to keep that shock to himself. Conniving forwards knew to exploit that vulnerability. "It is not an easy life," he says. "I feel fear of losing, of course. But unfortunately I do not feel any fear in the game. I say 'unfortunately' because sometimes it could have turned against me, not being scared. That's why I protect myself in my goal area. Everybody does." But he did concede he was rather an extreme case. "I know, but as I see it, it's him or me. So I'd better decide for the opponent to get injured and not me." It's an utterly logical appraisal, as one might expect from such an efficient thinker.

There was one incident in the 2006/2007 season when Arsenal were visiting Stamford Bridge in December and Drogba lost his balance in flamboyant style after a push in the back from Lehmann. The striker stood up again and nudged the Arsenal goalkeeper, who fell down before getting to his feet. This minor

fracas provoked much discussion and an element of derision from those who felt the Christmas pantomime season had come early. Lehmann, to his credit, was among them. "To be honest, I felt a little bit embarrassed when I saw it on TV, but I went down because here the referees are sometimes so fragile that you think: 'Well, if I go down it might help me not get booked or a red card because sometimes they're hysterical for nothing.' I didn't hurt Drogba. I just pushed him a little bit and he went down. So I thought: 'Oh, I don't want to get a booking here or be sent off' because Drogba made a lot of it. So I went down myself, but like I said before, it's not a thing I like about myself. Normally, I don't do that, I don't go down that easy."

A familiar presence around the Arsenal training ground is Bob Wilson, Arsenal's 1971 Double-winning keeper and long-time coach. He knows a thing or 10 about the dangers to which goalkeepers are continually exposed. He was always willing to list the litany of after-effects from serious football batterings, as befitted a man who used to dive head-first at the feet of on-rushing forwards. "I've had 20 stitches around my skull, eight in one of my eyebrows, at least a dozen in my face, my left ear torn off at Ipswich, a chipped collar bone in Tokyo's Olympic stadium, a punctured lung, a dozen broken ribs at different times in my career, one broken right arm, one broken right wrist, one dislocated right elbow, a broken finger in my left hand, a dislocated finger on my right hand, a knee injury that virtually finished my career involving cartilage, ligaments and tendons, big scars to this day on my legs and one broken left ankle inflicted in training by the manager, Billy Wright."

After such a list, one begins to feel more sympathy with Lehmann's view. "I had a big cruciate injury when I was 21," the German says. "I was out for four and a half months, so I knew it could be all over for me and football soon. Just in case that happened I decided to go to university to study economics. If I needed to, I could swap to being a full-time student. I did not actually get my degree, it was too much, but it was a good insurance policy."

What are the qualities Lehmann considers are necessary to be a top goalkeeper? "Courage, a good understanding of the game, good reading [of the game] and technique. I wouldn't say I have a sixth sense. I wouldn't say I'm a specialist in that way. What I did was to work hard on my body and on my technique. I didn't have to work hard on my concentration skills because I already had that from school. At university, I could concentrate for hours. You could say that fame and fortune came to me quite late in my life. But when you are an 18-year-old guy and you play in a professional team as I did, you are already 'famous'. Compared to now, of course, it was very, very little."

Some people say that goalkeepers are eccentric – it's something to do with

the small six-yard world they inhabit and the fact they are the last line of defence. "Eccentric? I can't really grab that idea. Football is so popular that people talk about it all the time and a lot of rubbish is spoken. I do not think a goalkeeper is an outsider, either. I have always felt to be an insider, and a team player. I think that is the reason I was picked to play for Germany in the World Cup." Perhaps he meant as opposed to Kahn, who said after the 2006 World Cup that Germany would have won had he been picked in goal. Yet Lehmann was the goalkeeper who saved those two Argentina penalties. The home country could hardly have asked for anything more from him.

Lehmann's pale eyes smile a little when he talks. Does he have a sense of humour? "I would say so," he says seriously. Perhaps he does, but if so, then why doesn't it show itself on the pitch? "How can it? There are players who can laugh because they are not in such a position as I am. If I lose my concentration, probably we lose a game. As a striker, I can joke, but as a goalkeeper at no time whatsoever." As serendipitous proof, Freddie Ljungberg that very minute passes the doorway and mutters a fond insult at his German friend. So that was the Swedish sense of humour? "Yes," the German replies. It's not the same as his sense of humour, perhaps? "Well, of course it's the same as mine, otherwise he would not have called me that. The thing is I'm not so good at English that I can tell jokes very authentically, but I do laugh."

So how does Lehmann, perhaps regarded by the outside world as a slightly austere figure, have fun with his team-mates? "By talking. I am interested in my team-mates. As an older player you have to open up to your team-mates, not as a duty, but as an interest. It makes a team live."

It cannot be easy when, at the age of 37, he has had a defence in front of him with an average age of 21, and the fulcrum of the team, Francesc Fabregas, is just 19 (even if the Spaniard is mature beyond his years). "There is just an eight-year gap between my oldest son and some of the Arsenal defenders. But I don't father them. We all have to deliver. Sometimes, when I'm telling them things, it's up to them whether they, first, listen, and second, agree. I don't want to be famous for yelling at them from my six-yard box, but sometimes you have to do that as a keeper."

Suddenly, without warning – with a weather eye on the time – he stands up and politely, but firmly, says: "I've got to go now. I'm sorry." There's just time for one last insight. What type of man is he, beyond being a stupendous club and international goalkeeper? A golfer? Theatre goer? Economist? Fisherman? He is reluctant to answer. "I think people know such a lot about me ..." he says. On the contrary, they know very, very little about this private man. "Well, that's good," he says and strides away.

**Sue Mott**

# The Invincibles

Success in football is often, at least partially, a matter of luck. That is inevitable in a moving-ball game with the imponderables of the bounce and the element of physical challenge, although it has often been said that a team makes its own luck; to quote the golfer Gary Player, the more you practise, the luckier you get.

When Nottingham Forest, managed by Brian Clough, achieved their record run of 42 matches unbeaten in 1978, they will have had their moments of unexpected good fortune, just as Arsenal did when surpassing them in 2004 – missing by one match the magical total of 50. Each club had a squad of fine players: across the history of the game, part of the quality of great teams has consisted of making fewer mistakes than the rest, not giving the ball away unnecessarily, and wearing down the opposition by making them labour to retrieve it.

Nottingham Forest did not have exceptional players, other than Peter Shilton in goal, but they had a profusion of men who, under Clough's leadership, complemented each other: Viv Anderson, Larry Lloyd, Frank Clark and Kenny Burns in defence; four from John McGovern, Archie Gemmill, Martin O'Neill, Ian Bowyer and John Robertson in midfield; John O'Hare and Peter Withe in attack. Their unbeaten run began on November 26, 1977, and continued through to winning the 1977/1978 League title. It actually extended more than three months into the next season, until November 25, 1978, but too many draws saw them concede the 1978/1979 League title to Liverpool by eight points. Nonetheless, it was going to require something special to surpass their achievement...

## May 2003

In the spring of 2003, any hope that Arsène Wenger's team had of taking the Premiership title that season perished with defeat to Leeds United when both Patrick Vieira and Sol Campbell were absent. Wenger was obliged, no doubt with reluctance, to congratulate his arch-rival Sir Alex Ferguson on again

steering Manchester United to the top. The need now for Arsenal was to finish the season on a high note, including the FA Cup Final against Southampton.

By coincidence, one of Arsenal's two remaining League matches was also against Southampton and it provided a riveting rehearsal at Highbury for the final in Cardiff. Southampton were thrashed 6-1, with Jermaine Pennant and Robert Pires each scoring a hat-trick. A glorious four-man move created the second for Pires, with elusive footwork by Thierry Henry opening the way for Pennant's third. Yet the star of the afternoon, admittedly against a risible defence, was Ray Parlour. To establish Arsenal as favourites beyond doubt for Cardiff, four days later they put four goals past Sunderland. While Henry enjoyed the distinction of being nominated footballer of the year by both the Professional Footballers' Association and the Football Writers' Association, David Seaman, at 39, encountered disillusionment after he was omitted from the England squad following 75 caps spread across 15 years. Nonetheless, the veteran goalkeeper captained the side to a one-goal victory in Cardiff in the 122nd FA Cup Final.

### **June-July 2003**

A busy summer for Wenger included the signing of new contracts by Henry, Pires, Dennis Bergkamp and Vieira. Departures included Seaman, after 13 years' service, to Manchester City, and defender Oleg Luzhny to Wolverhampton Wanderers. Seaman was replaced by Jens Lehmann, a 6ft 3in goalkeeper from Borussia Dortmund, while other arrivals included Philippe Senderos, an 18-year-old Swiss central defender from Servette, of Geneva, Gaël Clichy, an 18-year-old left-back from Cannes, and Francesc Fabregas, a precocious 16-year-old shrewdly signed from Barcelona.

Elsewhere Roman Abramovich, a Russian billionaire, was buying Chelsea from Ken Bates for £150 million, David Beckham was quitting Manchester United for Real Madrid, and former Tranmere Rovers player Mark Palios was becoming chief executive of the FA.

### **August 2003**

Arsenal started the 2003/2004 season with defeat to Manchester United in the relatively unimportant Community Shield encounter in Cardiff – going down 4-3 on penalties – but began their Premiership programme with a straightforward 2-1



home win over Everton. In attack Sylvain Wiltord partnered Henry, who opened the scoring with a penalty after an elbowing by defender Alan Stubbs, while Martin Keown was replaced in central defence by a young Kolo Touré from the Ivory Coast.

Next Arsenal travelled north, to wallop Middlesbrough 4-0: so convincingly that they were three goals ahead inside 30 minutes through Henry, Gilberto – the Brazilian midfielder's first goal – and Wiltord, who added a fourth. Continuing a sequence that would bring victories in their opening four games, Aston Villa were beaten 2-0 at home after Sol Campbell's second-half header from a corner and Henry's disdainful flick late in the game. Although Lauren put through his own goal early on at the City of Manchester Stadium, Manchester City were beaten 2-1, with Wiltord equalising before Freddie Ljungberg punished a blunder by Seaman, his former colleague, to seal the points.

## September 2003

At home to promoted Portsmouth, Arsenal went behind to Teddy Sheringham's glancing header, but a point was retrieved when Henry scored from a penalty that had to be retaken. During the week, the team suffered a sharp reverse against Inter Milan in their first Champions League game, with a 3-0 defeat – the heaviest at home in a European tie since losing 5-2 to Spartak Moscow 11 years earlier.

From that setback, the team travelled to Old Trafford: here was the first occasion when the record-to-be hung by the merest thread. Vieira became the 52nd Arsenal player dismissed in seven years, receiving a second yellow card for over-reacting to an incident with Ruud van Nistelrooy who then struck the bar from a late penalty. Ill-feeling erupted in the tunnel after this goalless draw and eight players – Ryan Giggs and Cristiano Ronaldo of United, and Vieira, Lauren, Lehmann, Parlour, Ashley Cole and Martin Keown – were subsequently charged by the Football Association with various offences.

Not a happy punctuation, but, on a rainy day at Highbury, form and composure were recovered with a fluctuating 3-2 victory over Newcastle United. A miskick by Titus Bramble six yards out presented Henry with an open goal, Laurent Robert levelled the score, only for Gilberto to restore the lead following a free kick by Pires. Again Newcastle levelled with a slick goal from Oliver Bernard, but a saucily chipped penalty by Henry 11 minutes from time allowed Arsenal to move four points clear at the top of the table.

## October 2003

Surviving a trip to Russia four days earlier, when they achieved a goalless draw against Lokomotiv Moscow without Vieira, Ljungberg or Campbell, Arsenal now faced the often hazardous trip to Anfield. Trailing early in the game to a Harry Kewell strike, Arsenal equalised when, from a free kick by Pires, Edu's header seemed to be deflected into his own goal by Sami Hyypia, and a superbly bent drive by Pires, cutting in from the left, earned the three points.

At home to Chelsea, Edu's early free kick was deflected into the net, giving goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini no chance, but Hernan Crespo theatrically equalised from 25 yards. With 15 minutes to go, Cudicini made the finest of saves from Henry after a five-man move, only then to fumble a cross from Pires, before Henry almost apologetically stroked the ball home.

Losing 2-1 to Dynamo in Kiev – which left Arsenal bottom of their Champions League group with one point from their first three games – they returned home to draw 1-1 with Charlton Athletic at The Valley thanks to Henry's memorable free kick; the ball spun like a top as it curved through at least 20 degrees. Yet any euphoria from that point gained was dulled four days later when the FA handed out substantial fines to players over the Old Trafford fracas after the Club admitted misconduct.

## November 2003

On the first day of the month, four goals were swept past an ailing Leeds United. Henry opened proceedings with a scintillating goal, gliding in from the left wing, accelerating inside two defenders and stroking the ball into the net with geometric precision. Hesitant defence brought Pires the second; Bergkamp struck a post for Henry to rifle in the third on the rebound, while Gilberto timed a run perfectly to meet a long ball in from the left from Pires.

The only goal at home to Dynamo Kiev, from Cole, improved the European perspective, which was further enhanced before the end of the month by a crushing 5-1 away victory over Inter. In between were wins over Tottenham Hotspur and Birmingham City. Spurs's last win at Highbury had been in 1993, but a classic, old-fashioned derby saw them a little unlucky to lose 2-1, after Darren Anderton had given them the lead. The mercurial Henry looked suspiciously offside as he collected a pass and equalised, before Kanu's weaving run produced a winner for Ljungberg, aided by a huge looping deflection.

Birmingham were simply outclassed by Arsenal's passing and the wizardry

of Henry; he made all three goals for Ljungberg, Bergkamp and Pires. The month closed with a goalless draw at Highbury. Fulham were kept in the match only by four stunning saves by Edwin van der Sar.

## **December 2003**

Leicester City held Arsenal to a 1-1 draw after Gilberto's opening goal was cancelled out by Craig Hignett's late equaliser. Following a comfortable two-goal home win over Lokomotiv Moscow – with goals from Ljungberg and Pires securing second place in the group – Blackburn Rovers were beaten at Highbury with the only goal, scored by Bergkamp. Two fine saves by Lehmann protected the lead. After 18 Premiership games, Arsenal were leading the table with 13 wins, five draws and a goal aggregate of 40-12.

Arsenal next travelled to Bolton Wanderers and were held to a 1-1 draw. An important save by Lehmann from Kevin Nolan preceded a close-range opening goal from Pires, with Bolton caught in confusion, but Morten Gamst Pedersen's goal secured a home point. On Boxing Day, Wolverhampton Wanderers were left in disarray as they were trounced 3-0 at Highbury: an opening own-goal by Jody Craddock from a corner by Pires was followed by two from Henry, who danced past three men for the side's third.

Two days after Abramovich was reported to be attempting to lure Sven-Göran Eriksson to be Chelsea manager, Arsenal bagged the points away to Southampton, a whisper of a pass from Henry giving Pires the only goal. At this halfway stage of the Premiership, Arsenal lay in second place, a point behind Manchester United, the leaders despite Rio Ferdinand having been banned for eight months.

## **January 2004**

The month began with Leeds being hammered in the FA Cup third round. Arsenal then stayed up north for a 1-1 draw with Everton at Goodison Park. Henry and Ljungberg set up Nwankwo Kanu's first goal of the season, but Tomasz Radzinski gave Everton a share of the points.

Arsenal ensured a miserable month for Middlesbrough with 4-1 victories in both the Premiership and the FA Cup. The highlight of the League game, on January 10, was the humiliation of the over-physical Danny Mills, who was nutmegged by Henry near a corner flag. Mills had tried verbally to undermine

Henry when the Frenchman was preparing to take the penalty which had broken Boro's resistance to wave after wave of attacks. A second came from a deflected Henry free kick; Pires then scored his ninth in 15 games and Kanu bamboozled three defenders to present Ljungberg with the fourth.

In between the Middlesbrough games, Arsenal secured a solid 2-0 win away to Aston Villa. A quick free kick by Henry, after Vieira had been felled, enabled the striker to score while Villa were still organising their defensive wall. More Kanu magic led to Henry's second from a penalty.

## February 2004

José Antonio Reyes, a 20-year-old striker signed by Wenger from Sevilla, made his full debut on February 3 in the Carling Cup against Middlesbrough, who gained a modicum of revenge for their two thrashings the previous month by beating a depleted Arsenal team 2-1. Two days earlier, though, a 2-1 home victory against Manchester City had kept the Premiership ball rolling. Arsenal's second goal that day, by Henry, defined the perfection with which that supreme player strikes the ball. On a rainy day, his shot was so clean, his instep so exactly curled round the ball, that it had no spin whatsoever as it flew into the net. This was to be the first of three victories in 10 days: Wolves lost 3-1 at home, Bergkamp hitting the first and Henry taking his Club tally to 99 after Wolves had drawn level. Touré's header completed the victory. Henry's 100th goal came after a breakaway at home to Southampton in the next League game. Lehmann's electric save from Brett Ormerod protected the lead before Henry's cool side-step sealed the points.

This victory set a Club record of 24 matches unbeaten in the top division. Playing alongside Bergkamp (who replaced an injured Henry), the exciting Reyes, with two goals, secured a home victory over Chelsea in the fifth round of the FA Cup. A week later the 2-1 scoreline was repeated at Stamford Bridge in the Premiership, despite Arsenal going behind to a strike by Eidur Gudjohnsen within the first 30 seconds. But Vieira equalised with his first goal of the season, and Edu then put Arsenal ahead from a corner with just over 20 minutes played. Gudjohnsen's sending-off on the hour enabled Arsenal to hold onto their lead quite comfortably.

Shortly before an encouraging away win over Celta Vigo in the Champions League – both goals coming from Edu – there was a double bonus for Arsenal off the field. First, Arsène Wenger signed a contract extension until 2006, and then the Club announced that funding had been secured for its new £357 million

stadium, to be built a stone's throw from Highbury. Following the Celta success, Charlton were beaten 2-1 at home, with Pires striking his 50th goal and Henry exhibiting unbelievable balance and timing to score the second before Claus Jensen's consolation goal. Arsenal now held a nine-point lead over rivals Manchester United and Chelsea.

## **March 2004**

The style and extravagance of much of Arsenal's play was now generating appreciation across the country. When Portsmouth were routed 5-1 in the sixth round of the FA Cup, Arsenal were given a standing ovation by the Fratton Park crowd, who had been chanting: "Can we watch you every week?" Henry and Ljungberg had scored twice each, and Henry would hit both goals four days later in the home leg against Celta Vigo, putting Arsenal into the Champions League quarter-final, in which they would be drawn against Chelsea.

Meanwhile, the Premiership continued with an impressive 2-0 away win against Blackburn. A boomerang of a free kick by Henry opened the scoring and the second goal by Pires involved a delicious move encompassing Pires, Vieira and Gilberto, the Brazilian's shot parried by Brad Friedel and rebounding to Pires. Bolton were dismissed 2-1 at Highbury, with Pires and Bergkamp providing a two-goal lead that was never seriously threatened. Chelsea were then held 1-1 in the Champions League quarter-final first leg at Stamford Bridge, Pires levelling a goal by Gudjohnsen when out-jumping John Terry to meet a deep cross from Ashley Cole.

Next followed another tense confrontation with Manchester United, this time at Highbury, with United 12 points adrift. Lehmann, by now steadiness itself in goal, was expert in the first half; in the second, a spectacular swerving drive by Henry left Roy Carroll stranded. Late in the game Louis Saha, an expensive buy for United from Fulham, snatched a draw at the end of a fine move. Nonetheless, it was a new Arsenal record of 30 successive games unbeaten.

## **April 2004**

The first nine days of April proved to be the toughest, and to an extent the cruellest, phase of the season, with a crucial Premiership victory following two successive Cup defeats. Firstly, Manchester United toppled Arsenal in an FA Cup semi-final at Villa Park, with Wenger deciding to start with Henry on the

bench, his place taken by Jérémie Aliadière. A good start evaporated and on the half-hour Paul Scholes, from Giggs's centre, scored the only goal. It was Arsenal's first defeat in 19 consecutive ties in the FA Cup, and four days later they blundered at home to Chelsea in the Champions League, going down 2-1. Just on half-time Lauren's cross was headed back by Henry for Reyes to put them ahead, but with Jesper Gronkjaer replacing Scott Parker for Chelsea in the second half, Chelsea's attack accelerated. Frank Lampard equalised, and the full-back Wayne Bridge struck the winner three minutes from time.

Visions of the Treble had evaporated within four days, and three days after the Champions League exit, on Good Friday, Liverpool were the Premiership opponents at Highbury. It was make-or-break day for the Club emotionally, and they met the challenge head-on, winning 4-2 after twice going behind. A diving close-range header by Hyypia put Liverpool ahead, but Henry then scoring from the acutest of angles. Back came Liverpool, Steven Gerrard setting up Michael Owen to make it 2-1. In the second half, Henry and Ljungberg carved the way through for Pires again to level the score and now Henry shone his brightest. Weaving away from four men, he gave Arsenal the lead, then sealed victory from a cross by Bergkamp, the ball rebounding off him after Jerzy Dudek smothered his first shot. Wenger, declaring it one of his proudest moments with Arsenal, had simply told his men at half-time: "This is not us," and described the victory as "the turning point of the season, because we were never at such a low".

Two days later a goalless draw was secured away to Newcastle, with Lehmann making another crucial save and Reyes hitting the goalkeeper when he should have scored from a close-range opening. Five goals without reply against luckless Leeds put Arsenal on a high, now nine points ahead of second-placed Chelsea. Henry struck four goals, the second a penalty, the first and third laid on by Gilberto, and the fourth the best of all, after a solo run of 40 yards. This was his 38th of the season and 150th for Arsenal, surpassing John Radford's 149 to become Arsenal's third-highest ever scorer behind Ian Wright and Cliff Bastin. A short journey down the road to White Hart Lane brought echoes of the past, of the day when Ray Kennedy's late header had clinched the League title of 1970/1971, the first leg of the Club's first Double. This time, Arsenal were ahead within three minutes, Henry and Bergkamp combining on the left to open the way for Vieira, whose well-timed run presented him with a simple goal. By half-time Pires had added a second, but before the end Jamie Redknapp and Robbie Keane, with a penalty, had earned Tottenham Hotspur a draw. Nonetheless, a point was enough to reward Arsenal with their 13th League title, and their second in three years. "To win the title without losing a single game is a

tremendous achievement," Wenger reflected. There were four games left to play in the season.

## **May 2004**

The first two of these remaining games were rather tame draws – goalless at home to Birmingham and 1-1 away to Portsmouth, for whom Yakubu opened the scoring thanks to a lucky bounce. Reyes ensured a point with a shot in off the post. Arsenal's unbeaten record would have stopped dead had not Lehmann saved from Yakubu when the Nigerian striker should have scored with ease. "No one in the team has been more consistent," was the tribute to Lehmann from former goalkeeping icon Bob Wilson.

An uncharacteristic error by Van der Sar enabled Reyes to score the only goal away to Fulham; there remained only Leicester to be played at home. Former Highbury striker Paul Dickov gave the visitors a shock lead, but Henry scored an equaliser from a penalty for his 30th League goal of the season – the first time that had been achieved since Ronnie Rooke in the 1940s. Vieira, appropriately the skipper, secured a 2-1 victory, and for the first time in 105 years – since Preston North End in 1888/1889 – a team had gone unbeaten through the season. "It was always a dream," Wenger said, "and we have shown it's still possible in the modern game." Arsenal's record was: played 38, won 26, drawn 12. Preston, by comparison, had had to play only 22 matches. Lehmann had played in every game; Touré and Henry in 37, the latter with his 30 goals; Pires 36, with 14 goals; Campbell 35; Gilberto, Cole and Lauren 32, Ljungberg 30, Vieira 29 and Bergkamp 28.

## **June-July 2004**

The close season saw the departure from Highbury of Martin Keown and Ray Parlour: the defender to Leicester City, the midfielder to Middlesbrough after over 13 seasons in which his commitment personified the attitude within the Club. Arrivals included Robin van Persie and Mathieu Flamini. Van Persie had been the Dutch Young Player of the Year in 2002, and Wenger had to beat off earnest rivals for his signature. Flamini arrived from Marseilles having already played for France Under-21s. Additionally, Manuel Almunia was signed from Celta Vigo as cover for Lehmann. Meanwhile, Giovanni van Bronckhorst decided to stay with Barcelona following his loan move. Happily Patrick Vieira

chose to remain at Highbury, after another period of intense speculation about his alleged departure.

## August 2004

The new season began with a bang. Everton were swamped 4-1, with Bergkamp and Reyes establishing a two-goal lead and, after Lee Carsley had pulled one back, Ljungberg and Pires adding another two. Trailing 3-1 early in the second half at home to Middlesbrough, Arsenal appeared to have hit the buffers. It proved an illusion. Middlesbrough's lead was partially thanks to the early brilliance of Mark Schwarzer in goal, and after Henry had saucily opened the scoring with a lob, Middlesbrough went into overdrive, with goals coming from Joseph-Desire Job, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and Franck Queudrue in 10 minutes either side of half-time.

Arsenal's resilience remained, though, and second-half goals from Bergkamp, Pires, Reyes and Henry showed that Arsenal were not to be underestimated, even on an off-day. Having equalled Nottingham Forest's unbeaten record of 42 games, the record was a mere three days away, with Blackburn Rovers being over-run 3-0 at Highbury. Henry was involved in each goal: he scored the first, hit the corner for Fabregas to head the second, then dazzled the defence before unselfishly presenting Reyes with an open goal for the third.

On to Norwich City and a 4-1 hammering for the home side. Henry left Norwich's dysfunctional defence in ruins when setting up Reyes for the opening goal, and others followed from Henry, Pires and Bergkamp, Darren Huckerby's penalty was the Canaries' only reply. Next up was Fulham, and although Chris Coleman, Fulham's manager, complained about a number of refereeing decisions, the final 3-0 scoreline was hardly in dispute. The Champions League campaign began with an own-goal victory at home to PSV Eindhoven. This was followed by a 2-2 draw at Highbury against Bolton, who twice recovered from being behind to goals from Henry and Pires. A week later Cole scored the only goal away to Manchester City, thrillingly beating two men before neatly flicking the winner. The lively form of Shaun Wright-Phillips could not unhinge Arsenal's defence, and Kevin Keegan's side generally lacked the co-ordination seriously to threaten Arsenal's continuing run. Ascendancy was again confirmed as they trounced Charlton by four goals in the rain at Highbury. An error by Jason Euell was punished by Ljungberg before Henry struck a shot more audacious than most: blind to the goal when facing the wrong way, and with the



angle seemingly impossible and defender Jonathan Fortune standing almost between his shoulder-blades, he back-heeled the ball through Fortune's legs. Dean Kiely in goal was left rooted. Henry's double exchange of passes with Reyes in the penalty area left Charlton baffled as Henry scored again, and Reyes hit a fourth.

A fortnight later it was Aston Villa's turn to be outclassed, never mind Lee Hendrie putting them in front after only three minutes and deputy goalkeeper Stefan Postma making a string of notable saves. Henry was felled to give Pires a levelling penalty, Henry scored with a slick shot to put Arsenal ahead, and was then involved in a five-pass move to present Pires with his second. "I feel privileged to work with these players," said a jubilant Wenger, the unbeaten run having reached 49. David O'Leary, Villa's manager and former Highbury defensive rock, reflected: "They've gone from boring Arsenal to being the most popular of teams." There was jubilation of a different calibre with the news that Emirates Airlines of Dubai had signed a £100 million contract to sponsor the new 60,000-seat stadium at adjacent Ashburton Grove, for which the stadium would carry their name.

Finally, however, one short of a scarcely credible 50th unbeaten match, the roller-coaster came to a halt. And where else but Old Trafford? The man who wielded the axe was Wayne Rooney, on his 19th birthday. Not that the game was without controversy, of course. After a quarter-of-an-hour Ljungberg was put through on goal by Bergkamp, only to be sent tumbling by Rio Ferdinand. The referee, Mike Riley, strangely saw no offence. Then Henry forced an admirable save out of Carroll, but as the game progressed, Manchester United increasingly dominated. With 17 minutes remaining came the blow that Arsenal would always dispute. Campbell, caught off-balance by Rooney's sudden change of direction, made an ineffectual challenge as Rooney sped past. Rooney plunged headlong and Riley awarded United a penalty: the eighth he had given in eight visits to Old Trafford. Ruud van Nistelrooy put away the penalty, sending Lehmann the wrong way.

There was to be no Arsenal revival, for all their pressure, and in added time Rooney scored from Alan Smith's low centre. If the circumstances of the first goal were debatable, there was no denying a commanding performance by Ferdinand. Wenger and his men will have known that their glorious sortie had to end somewhere, yet for it to happen as it did was hard to swallow, though the misfortune did not dissuade Arsenal's most successful manager from signing a new three-year contract shortly afterwards.

**David Miller**

## INTERVIEW

# King Henry

**Part one: in which Thierry Henry reflects on the influences and experiences that made him the player he is today, and describes his love of London, Dennis Bergkamp – and Arsenal**

He will always call it "Eye Berry". It was his home, his garden, for seven beautiful years and just like the football that he played on the premises, he Gallicised even its name. It was "Highbury" to the locals, but once a young World Cup winner from Paris arrived in the summer of 1999, the 'H' went missing.

The place where Wilf 'Iron Man' Copping had entered into tackles like a tank, where Peter Storey had roamed like a hunter, where Malcolm Macdonald had attacked with all the subtlety of a charging bullock, where "crunch" was the predominant sound effect ... all this was transformed under the cultivating nous of Arsène Wenger. And there, at the heart of that artistic revolution, was the winger he turned into a striker, the young man he rescued from Juventus, the centre piece of his attacking philosophy, the record breaking king of cool, Thierry Henry. Highbury was his garden. Wenger had said so, and as usual, the Frenchman's romantic adoption of his third language, English, was perfect. Only the traditional arcs of roses and banks of geraniums had been replaced by sweet, lofted passes and a bucketload of goals. Henry's horticultural speciality was scoring.

"I don't know if it was my garden. Maybe I wouldn't go that far," Henry said, with unnecessary modesty, as he looked back over his goal scoring years at the ground that he came to love. "There was something special about Highbury. You could feel the history of the Club when you arrived. It is difficult to describe, but perhaps it was something about being an old fashioned stadium. It lasted a long time. It was a thing of beauty not just a stadium, or a building, because Arsenal made a lot of history at Highbury. We won titles there, we won cups. There was a lot of vibe there.

"Yet what I liked most about Highbury was a nice, quiet thing, actually. Let's say we were playing on a Saturday afternoon. I had to meet the team at the ground. I would park my car in the car park under the stadium and arrive at the side of the pitch. Then I'd walk along it. Just me and the pitch and the stadium. No one else was there. The grass was always beautiful. That wet ... I don't know how you call it ... in the morning." He waited for the answer "Dew".

Henry considered the word 'dew'. "OK," he said, trusting the suggestion. "OK, there was no one in the stand. No one around. Just me and the stadium. Yet

I knew five hours later, it would be another scene. It was a privilege to see it like that, before we played, because people didn't realise how amazing the pitch was. The grass what a joy it was for us to play on it. When I walked there like that, sometimes I heard the fans you know, from previous games, from previous goals that I had scored. Great moments. Even, sometimes, bad moments. The walk on my own was not even 10 seconds, but that was long enough to remember the great things that had happened on that amazing pitch. I don't want to go too far with this: it was not a spiritual thing, but I felt like there was an interaction between me and the whole stadium that something was happening."

He talks exactly the same way that he runs at gazelle like speed hurdling English consonants as if they were flailing, out stretched legs of beaten defenders. He is well dressed, manicured and presented, even though he is engulfed in a fur trimmed green jacket. Yet cool is not cold. Sophisticated is not aloof. Henry was not a foreign mercenary at Highbury: he was as much beloved for his heart as his 200 goals. The Frenchman used the 'bad memories', as he calls them, to strive for ever greater performances. "It was good to have those bad memories because then you appreciate the good ones even more," he said. "Don't get me wrong, I always love to win, but sometimes it can be nicer when you win if you have lost before. It is not the same joy when you always win. When you fall, and then bounce back to succeed, that is a different joy."

The joy of redemption. He has known that for a long time. All the way back to his first kick of a ball when his playing field was a stretch of unforgiving concrete. "I didn't have a garden in Les Ulis. Everything was concrete." Les Ulis was the area of Paris where 'Titi' Henry was born on August 17, 1977, the son of Toni and Maryse, both from the French Antilles. Les Ulis, which consists of a series of state subsidised, uniform grey tower blocks, lacks the tangles of vivid Caribbean colour, but their young son didn't care. He had eyes only for a ball.

"To go and find a pitch with grass, we had to walk a long way," he said. "So usually we were playing on concrete instead, making up a goal with coats or a jumper that was all. Even when I was a little older and we used to go further into Paris, we played on that red surface like clay. Everything for me came from there. My dad played a big part in my life and in where I am now as a footballer. But you cannot learn that street thing, that desire, that anger I don't mean anger in a bad way, but anger to try to be the best, because you have one ball for the whole neighbourhood. Sometimes you have 50 people playing outside and just one ball."

His eyes looked dreamy as he tapped his perfectly groomed fingernails along the table, while recalling the quick fire bounce of that one precious ball from 20 years before. "The ball bouncing and everybody following that helped me work

on my skills. To keep the ball, to be first to the ball, to fight for the ball that's where I learnt all that desire, anger and how precious it is to have the ball. Sometimes people don't understand where I come from, why I am the way I am on the pitch. You see it when I am on the pitch. I play 100 per cent: I play with my heart. Sometimes, when things are not going my way, you can see I am upset. When things are going my way, you can see I'm happy. It's difficult for me to act when I'm on the pitch. I play for the love of the game. When I don't succeed, it is difficult to accept. I always put myself back to where I was when I was young."

The young Henry had an advantage over his contemporaries on the concrete, though. He might have been skinny, but he was lightning quick. His uncle Joseph had been a hurdler and was rumoured to have won a very important 400m hurdle race, but no one seems to know for sure how important it was. "Probably, he was a junior champion. Nothing massive," he said.

However, the genetic inheritance helped. So did Thierry's father's quest for continual improvement. If this was parental pressure, then it was something to which the young Henry responded. "I remember the time my dad ran on to the pitch in a junior game and there was a fight. At the time it was a bit embarrassing it is when you're young: I was only 11. We were playing a team that had a bad reputation and this guy didn't just foul me, he nearly got me into a fight. My dad stepped on to the pitch ... and I won't say the end. I was more embarrassed than anything, but your family want to protect you. You think it's uncool. But now I love him. My dad is really protective. I guess all parents are, but my dad is extra, extra. Extra. You know, if I had a cough, then we had to go and see the doctor straightaway. If I had a spot, he would worry what was going on.

"My dad's way will explain why people sometimes say I have a 'face on'. People say they wish I was smiling a bit more. But that's the way I am. My dad taught me never to be happy with what I have, never to be satisfied always give more. My dad was the sort of guy who, when I scored a hat trick, would say, 'Yeah, but you could have scored four'. If I didn't score, but I gave a goal to a team mate, he would say, 'Yeah, but you didn't score'. Always he would tell me the thing that I didn't do. That has always stayed in my mind. That's why, when I am on the pitch now, I always think about the things I didn't do: it keeps me on my toes for the next game. That's the only way you can make progress. That's my way. That's what I will say to my kids one day: 'Never be satisfied with what you have because people are behind you trying to get your place.' It might seem strange. Sometimes when I have had my best game, I go home and think all the time about the cross that I missed instead. I know perfection is impossible. No

one is perfect: you will never reach it. But I think about the goals I miss more than the ones that I score."

Henry was always his own hardest critic at Highbury. He could become visibly hangdog and disappointed with himself at times. "You have to understand: I'm happy with what I'm doing, but I'm never satisfied with it. That is the tricky line. I never said I wasn't happy. I just want to be more happy. I want to be happy all the time."

No one, not even footballers, can be happy all the time, but Henry's schooling at the French national football academy, at Clairefontaine, 30 miles southwest of Paris, proved a positive experience. He had gained a scholarship there at the age of 13 and remained until he was 16. During that time, he and his contemporaries, including Nicolas Anelka, Louis Saha, David Trézéguet and William Gallas, had learnt the techniques that will last them throughout their careers. Their feet became magic wands.

Henry never felt homesick there not once. "My parents had educated me to deal with my own stuff to make me a man before I arrived there. They were really good parents. They told me: 'One day you will be on your own and life is hard'. I was never the kid who was all the time in the phone booth saying 'Mum, I miss you'. I was never the one queuing to use the phone.

"What Clairefontaine did for me is pretty simple. When I arrived in the Monaco youth team, at the age of 16, I was way ahead of them technically. It had all been about playing football to enjoy the game, pass the ball well, play beautiful football. Everything was about beautiful football football, football, football. I never lost a game at Clairefontaine. Ever. We would play other youth teams in the area from Paris, or Auxerre. In my time, I played 12 games and we usually won 4 0 or something. Yet when I arrived in Monaco the competition started. We had great training sessions, but when we lost a match it did matter: you've arrived at the professional part of the journey."

It was a journey that took Henry, via a difficult year at Juventus – where the lack of freedom on the pitch didn't suit his game – to Arsenal. He recalled his debut, when he came on at half-time in place of Freddie Ljungberg, against Leicester City at Highbury, on August 7, 1999. "I was proud because, when I came on, the reception I had was just great," he said. The crowd had responded to the young right-winger who had cost their club millions. Considering that Anelka had been sold to Real Madrid the day before for considerably more, Henry constituted the bargain of the decade. Soon the Highbury faithful would come to realise that their new forward was to be the most prolific striker that Arsenal had ever seen.

However, first the new player required some bedding in. "I was actually a bit

disappointed with that first match because I could have scored two or three times," Henry said. "And I so wanted to give something back to the fans after that great reception. They had to wait a little while." Until September 18, in fact. "I first scored against Southampton and then again in the Champions League a few days later and it went on from there. I was playing centre-forward by then. It was easy for Arsène to change me because he had known me as a centre-forward when he was the boss at Monaco. I was put on the wing after he left and got used to playing there. I went into the national team as a winger, but when Arsène and I met up again at Arsenal, he said: 'You are going to play centre-forward. You were always scoring goals. I don't think you can lose that.'

"And I believed him. I did, I did, I did, I did, I did," Henry said, emphasising his faith in his manager with taps of his fingernails on the table. "For a while, when nothing was coming, I wondered if I should go back on the wing. Then it came, and after that I never looked back."

However, Henry did look around a little bit – not least for the fierce challenges during training of Martin Keown, and other 'helpful' members of the Arsenal back four, who liked to introduce new talents to the finer points of competitive football in the Premiership. "Keown – well, not only him, to be honest – Tony [Adams] was also really hard. And Lee [Dixon] and Nigel [Winterburn]. They were really tough in training, but it did me good," he said in homage to the ageing, but formidably disciplined, back line against which opposing forwards would batter themselves like rudderless ships onto rocks. "They introduced me straightaway to the English game. A lot of strikers will tell you that having them on your back is not easy. It really did help me. Don't get me wrong: it wasn't always funny. Sometimes in training it was pretty physical. Martin, especially, can get really physical. But you have to stand up for yourself. That's what they wanted me to do, so that when I arrived to play somebody else, I was ready. It was hard, but good."

Arsenal's Franco-Anglo alliance in the late 1990s was a potent mix. They had just won the Premiership and FA Cup Double when Henry arrived and he benefited from the Club's different styles. "From a personal point of view, the English game gave me a lot: passion, desire, commitment. I knew I would need that before, but in England you see even more. You see it on the faces of the players and fans – their commitment and passion. But we also bring something to the Club with our way of football, the way we pass the ball, keep it more on the ground, play with more flair. I think it's a great mix. And that's how the world is right now – a mix. The key is you need to mix it well. Without that, you wouldn't have known tea. Same for us. Who doesn't like to go and eat in a good Italian restaurant? That is what makes the beauty of London, for example. I do



like London. It is a really cosmopolitan town. There are so many places where you feel different vibes. Notting Hill is not the same as Portobello, which is not the same as Covent Garden, which is not the same as Knightsbridge. If you want to feel funky, you go to Soho. If you want to chill, you go to Hampstead. That's the beauty of it. It's the same with sport. The more you mix, the better it is. You need to be open-minded: same in life. Look at our dressing room. If I wanted to learn German I could talk to Jens [Lehmann]. Cesc Fabregas sat by me and sometimes I'd ask him how you say 'hello' or 'I miss you' in Catalan. Alex Hleb, I could ask him things in Belorussian. Simple things. Just to know ... one day I might go there.

"That's why when I first came to Arsenal and David Dein [the Club's vice-chairman], asked me if I wanted English lessons, I said, 'No, no lessons. I want to listen'. I was good at English. At school I knew a lot of vocabulary, but I couldn't put any sentences together. I spent a lot of time asking: 'What did you say?' at the beginning. You don't learn slang at school, the Cockney accent or what people are saying up North. You don't understand those things. So I wanted me, myself, to make my ears work. I wanted to learn that way."

Since we're talking about languages, it is worth noting that knowledge of the phrases 'Va-Va-Voom' and *Fait Accompli* were vastly enhanced in Islington after he had advertised Renault cars and overhauled Ian Wright's all-time Arsenal scoring record of 185 goals on Tuesday, October 18, 2005. The *Fait Accompli* T-shirts were everywhere. They were treasures.

His goalscoring mission was accomplished in the Champions League tie away to Sparta Prague with two goals: one artistic, the other pragmatic. Both underlined why he had been so sorely missed from the team for 38 days because of a groin injury. He was only a substitute that night, but came on as early as the 15th minute for José Antonio Reyes. Six minutes later he had scored after a delicate combination of touch, swivel and dagger-to-the-heart finish. He doubled his tally in the 74th minute, after running on to a pass from Pires, evading his marker and slipping the ball past the stricken Czech goalkeeper. Wright's mighty record had fallen.

Wenger paid tribute, saying: "The record is something exceptional and you have to respect that he beat it in a relatively short time. He was not especially a goalscorer [at the start of his Highbury career]. He was an all-round player, not hunting in the box for goals. It is nearly inexplicable that a guy who is not interested only in scoring goals can score so many. He'll go down in history, not only of Arsenal, but of football."

However, Henry was a little surprised that he broke the record on that particular day. "It seemed like the whole thing wasn't meant to happen. I wasn't

meant to come back training. I did. I wasn't meant to travel to Prague. I did. I wasn't meant to come on the pitch. I did. I wasn't meant to score. I did. Nothing was meant to happen. It did. The only thing that was a bit sad was that I wanted to do it at a home match. For me, it would have been better to do it at Highbury: it would have been amazing to beat the record of Ian Wright there. But I am sure that someday someone will take it from me, too. Maybe we won't see it for a while, but I am sure no one thought the record of Cliff Bastin would be broken, then Wrighty did it. I am not defensive about it. That's how the world is. But it is amazing to be able to leave your print. It says 'I have been there'. If you ask me if I am egotistical, I say this. I think people are sometimes scared to say the truth to themselves, to say what they really want. I came into the game to be the best: that is not big-headed or anything. I want to make stories, to leave footprints, to wear the jersey. I always said I wanted people to remember me as a good player. Everything I do I want to win – even at cards. I don't want people to say 'Oh, Henry, he was second best'."

Arsenal fans can speak truthfully of having seen Henry grow in stature and ingenuity until he had become recognised as one of the greatest players in the world. They can remember the signposts along the way:

- 1999/2000 season: Arsenal's top scorer with 26 goals in all competitions.
- December 2000: named French Footballer of the Year by the *France Football* newspaper.
- Boxing Day 2000: scored his first hat-trick, against Leicester City.
- 2000/2001 season: scored 22 goals in all competitions as Arsenal finished runners-up again in the Premiership.
- 2001/2002 season: scored 32 goals in all competitions and collected the award for being Premier League top scorer, inspiring Arsenal to League and FA Cup Double.
- January 2003: scored 100th goal for Arsenal against Birmingham City.
- 2002/2003 season: Professional Footballers' Association Player of the Year and Football Writers' Association Footballer of the Year.
- December 2003: runner-up to Zinedine Zidane as FIFA World Player of the Year.
- April 2003: scored 150th Arsenal goal, with four against Leeds United.
- 2003/2004 season: scored 30 league goals as Arsenal won title. Finished as Premier League top scorer again.
- May 2005: Won European Golden Boot (for top scorer) for second successive year.

Aptly, he had broken Wright's record not only during the Highbury Farewell season, but also the 200-goal barrier, too. The chances of posterity saying, 'Oh, Henry, he was second best', are pretty slim...

Meanwhile, he was playing for France and winning the odd trophy, such as Euro 2000 (finishing as France's top scorer with three goals) to compliment his World Cup-winning exploits. But how French did he feel after six years in London? "I go beyond French. Don't get me wrong: I am more than proud to be French. But I can assure you that when I speak about my home, I say 'London'. For sure I am going to live in London, even when I finish playing."

Clever – or devious – people will work out that Henry's children might qualify to play for England, if that is the nation of their birth. Henry was not so sure, though. "I don't have a boy yet. Whether my girl is going to be a footballer, I don't know. I don't know if her mum would be happy with that! One footballer in the family is enough.

"England, it's funny. I didn't understand the whole cricket thing when I went there, but now I do. I understand a lot of things more. One amazing thing is how you are so patriotic in England about sports. In France we are not the same. We like it when we win, that's all. In England, it's unbelievable. Any sport, as long as you are English, or British, and everyone is behind you. Then you lose and get hammered. But at least people give you their support while you are playing. I love it. You are proud to be English and I love that. Maybe I understand it better because I come from an island myself – people from islands are over-protective and always say their island is the best. My parents come from Guadeloupe and Martinique and are the same. It comes from the history, when people wanted to invade you: you have to protect yourself. The feeling gets passed from generation to generation. It's not done in a bad way. "I like it when I speak to Sol Campbell and he says '...in Europe', as though it is somewhere different. I say: 'You're in Europe'. But English people are telling you they are special. People from Guadeloupe are the same. They say their island is the most beautiful in the entire world."

Beautiful things – where do you go from there but to Dennis Bergkamp? They were team-mates, comrades, partners in stealth and goalscoring for nearly seven years. "Dennis is special. But I think there are two Dennises. The Dennis that you saw is one. And then the other Dennis that just we, his team-mates, saw. He was given the nickname 'The Iceman' because he has that beautiful face and he is so cool. But at the same time, he can kill you. With a smile also. He will look at you and you think 'Oh, he's cute'. Then you are dead.

"It was better to play with him than against him. With him in the team, I just knew I'd get the ball. That was enough. You knew he was going to try to please

you by giving you the ball. That's what football is all about, it is a collective sport. And, therefore, you need to please your team-mates. I never forget that. Alone you're nothing. People say sometimes 'Oh, Thierry, Thierry'. But without my team-mates, there's no 'Thierry, Thierry'. It's a team effort.

"I've been asked so many times if I wanted to be the King of Highbury, to be 'The One'. Dennis has been asked that, too. But you have to please your team-mates: you have to pass the ball to them because when you give a good ball to someone, it's like a gift. Sometimes when you don't get a good ball back, you can get grumpy. But if everyone has the same mentality then the team is going to be OK.

"A football team is like a family, like flesh and blood. Sometimes you have an argument with them, sometimes you're not even talking to them. You have an argument about some stupid thing. Well, football is the same. Perhaps even more so in football because we all have big egos. But when it's finished, it's finished and you forget it. I've been through a lot with Dennis – and the others. Obviously we will stay in touch. We can't have gone through all we have together and not talk to each other any more. The manager also. Arsène is Arsène. I will always give him a call and stay in touch. He's a great human being. Sometimes people don't get him: you have to actually read between the lines. He says one thing, but he actually means something else."

Indirectness has rarely been Henry's problem. He might relish a little juggling act near the touchline, or a dizzying run with every kink signifying a beaten defender, but given the ball and given the goal, he is apt to head for one with the other. There have been, literally, hundreds of goals to admire. He scarcely knows which to select as a favourite. All of them mattered and all of them contributed to the creation of a legend. Yet if you force him, he will choose a few.

"My greatest goal?" he mused. "There's the one that everyone remembers against Manchester United, when I flicked the ball over Fabien Barthez. That was in my second year at Highbury. There's the backheel against Charlton Athletic, the one against Spurs when I ran with the ball from my half ... but maybe my favourite was a goal against Liverpool that put us back on the winning track. We had lost to Manchester United in the FA Cup on the Saturday, and then had lost to Chelsea in midweek in the Champions League. Then we played Liverpool and we were 2-1 down. The whole stadium was feeling the vibe. Robert Pires scored to make it 2-2. Then I received the ball on the halfway line, ran past some Liverpool players, went into the box and scored. In that particular moment, I felt everyone at Highbury was waiting for that. Not just me: everyone. It was like an explosion in the stadium."

It was not the first – nor the last – of many such explosions from the boot of Arsenal's most prolific goalscorer of all time.

**Part Two: in which the French striker describes footballing ups and downs with both Club and country and explains why getting injured can be the toughest part of a player's career**

"How many goals did you score in the World Cup?" Jake, aged 8, asked to make conversation.

"Three," replied one of the world's greatest strikers, dressed immaculately in black shirt, black trousers, white shoes, as he paused midway through the photo-shoot to look at the youngster sitting on the floor near his feet.

"Three," Jake mused, as if he was not entirely bowled over by the total. "I saw one of them..."

"Which one?" Thierry Henry said.

"It was France..."

"Against...?"

"Patrick Vieira scored. Then you scored."

"Togo," Henry said. And then he smiled.

His smile was telling. He seemed relaxed and yet the Henry that was having his picture taken for the Arsenal Opus, some six months after the 2006 World Cup Final, was a man who had been roughed up by recent experiences. He had reached a Champions League Final against Barcelona, and lost. He had reached a World Cup Final with France against Italy, and lost. He had, to an outbreak of unconfined joy in at least the Arsenal parts of North London, decided to stay with Arsenal despite strong interest from Barca. Then, no sooner had he moved lock, stock and hydrotherapy pool from his beloved Highbury to Emirates Stadium, than he suffered two injuries. One neck, one leg, and perhaps a touch of post-trauma ennui, too.

However, he looked as immaculately dressed as ever and his interested discussion with Jake suggested that he was still in a good frame of mind despite dealing with the frustrations of an ailing hamstring, which would keep him out of the Arsenal team for several weeks in the middle part of the season. Henry was still 'The Man'.

The entire Arsenal team had trooped through the room to have their photographs taken for the spectacular 'Portrait gallery' section of the Opus. Henry, predictably, was the last. The camera crews had assembled at 9am; it was now 4pm. That was fashionable lateness run riot. But it was Gary Lewin, the Arsenal physiotherapist, who had delayed him, not delusions of prima donna grandeur.

Within seconds of arriving, the Frenchman reminded everyone of just why he is so popular: the principal attraction being his natural charm. He ran his hand over his scalp, looked into the camera, produced a stunning work of art in one take and reflected on the busy months just gone.

"France in the World Cup: realistically, everybody was laughing more about France in the two years up to Germany than anything else. It was still like that after the first three games against Switzerland [0-0], Korea [1-1] and Togo [2-0]. People were actually laughing about us. In the past [in 1998] we knew we were going to win; we had a feeling about it. But at the 2006 World Cup there wasn't that feeling. We were looking for a team – for a big game. The generation that had gone before, the France team that was scaring people ... no more. We had to re-learn about scaring other teams, and we had to learn about ourselves. Slowly but surely we started to look like a team again. We left it a little late in the tournament, but at the end of it, even though we missed the last step, everybody was happy with what we did."

That was one Henry opinion. Then he performed a typical volte face, and offered the opposite view. Not everybody was happy, after all. "It does haunt me, certainly," he said. "Nobody remembers who deserves to win. The records will say that Italy won on penalties in the final against France. Full stop. That is how it is. The only thing that matters in the game is that you win and we didn't. To the end of your life you are always going to have people reminding you about the 2006 World Cup. You are going to have a great story to tell with a bad ending."

No one had a better story, or a worse ending, to recount than Zinedine Zidane, Henry's longtime team-mate and the France captain; Zidane traded victory for notoriety that day by getting himself dismissed for headbutting the Italian defender Marco Materazzi in a moment of wild over-reaction. "One of the sayings in the French national team is: 'We live together, we die together'," Henry said. "I have never said a word against Zinedine after what he has done for French football – what he has done for football in general. Stuff happens sometimes that you cannot control. You live together, you die together and on that day we died together."

Henry knew the feeling. Arsenal's emotional defeat at the Stade de France in Paris against Barcelona in the final of the Champions League had provoked a strong reaction: frustration that a return to his home city should end so disappointingly, and pride in the young team playing alongside him that had almost made history in Highbury's final season.

The irony was not lost on him of playing in the final against the very team that were cajoling him to join them in the immediate close season. "It did hurt,"

he said. "When I'm upset, I cannot hide it; when I'm happy, I cannot hide it. It's just the way I am. That's why I have such a great relationship with the fans. They know what I'm all about. I'm an honest guy. That day I was pretty low because the Club were waiting for that trophy. We have never won it, and nor have I.

"It would have been a great thing to finally get our hands on the Champions League trophy because, as with France in the World Cup, people were not taking us seriously. We were kind of average in the League that year and when we drew Real Madrid in the round of 16 everybody thought we were out. That's why we wanted to make it last. We had such a young team that no one gave us a chance, but those games against Real changed our season. Unfortunately, as in the World Cup, it was the same ending. Same ending," he repeated for sad emphasis.

There had been nothing sad about the Arsenal training ground this particular day. The young team he had mentioned had become even younger now. Theo Walcott, aged 17, had just made his first Premiership start of the season, against Wigan Athletic. The defence had an average age of less than 25. Henry, Gilberto and Jens Lehmann were the veterans, the rest of the team were barely past boyhood.

You could tell as much from the photo-shoot. Emmanuel Adebayor was dressed head to toe in stunning regalia, something out of 1920s aristocracy. Julio Baptista had ripped off his shirt and posed half-naked for the camera. Not to be out-done, Emmanuel Eboué, had also taken off his shirt, to reveal a white vest and a raging sense of humour that had him screaming with laughter (and possibly pleasure) when he was shown the picture. Kolo Touré had tried one pose with a hat on (his initials picked out in diamante on the front), but eventually preferred to model bare-headed. A few others had no choice but to keep their hats on – bad hair days, perhaps – while Walcott still sported his silver paper crown from Arsenal's Christmas lunch party.

Henry had missed all this. He was still being treated for his injury. It was tough for him. This was the man who, in 2004/2005, scored 27 Premiership goals – more than the entire combined Sunderland squad had managed. This was the man whose utterance of 'Va-Va-Voom' had led the words to be added to the Oxford Concise English Dictionary. This was the man who, in three successive World Cups, had never been out-scored by a fellow France footballer. It was rumoured that Henry had once run the 100 metres in 10.1 seconds. In other words, he was an Olympian performer on the world stage. But just not right now. "Football is weird. It doesn't give you time to get rid of all the things in your head. Immediately we lost the Champions League Final I had to join up with the international squad for the World Cup. Just like that." And he clicked his fingers.



"For everybody else it's nice, it's cool, to get something out of your head and talk with your friends and family, but in football you can't. I had to act like nothing had happened. There is no time to grieve, no time to be happy. And now is not the time while I am injured. That's hard because you want to get out there and play. When I wake up every morning just now, the first thing I do is stretch out my leg and work out if – by a miracle overnight – the injury is not there any more. I've always said the worst enemy of a footballer is injury...

"If you stop a painter painting, he goes mad. If you stop a footballer playing football, he goes mad, too. He can live, he can breathe, but he goes mad because football is so special to him – to me. You feel useless. You feel like you are missing something. All I want to do is get rid of the injury and go back and help the team. After just one day of being injured I am already bored. But it's even more difficult if you stay around the training ground. You see the team going off to a game while you stay behind to have treatment. I don't know how players who have massive injuries cope mentally."

Henry made finishing look easy, season after season, but he knew also the agonies of decisionmaking. It took him a year to decide to stay with Arsenal. "It was a bit after the Champions League Final. I said something on the plane home to the fans, but it was a bit after that same night that I saw the boss and told him I wanted to stay.

"I am all heart. Every little thing that happened during that season affected me in some way. Youngsters coming to the training ground to tell me to stay, the fans all the time asking me to stay, yet saying they respected my decision because of what I had done for the Club. I love the Club, I love the boss, I love London ... even journalists, who are not Arsenal fans, were telling me not to leave. It was surreal. And I saw how big it was when I stayed. In the end. I am all heart and when the heart takes over, it makes your decision.

"Here was everything I wanted. I did think about Barcelona, I won't lie. It took me a year to make my decision. I'm a human being. But in the end my love of the Club made me stay – and I don't regret anything."

Except... "When it was done, that final game at Highbury against Wigan, I didn't want to leave the stadium." He hadn't said that he had scored a hat-trick in the match, kissed the ground and received the award for being the Premiership's top goalscorer that season. All that seemed to have slipped his mind. He was interested only in saying goodbye to an old friend.

"It was such a special place. Everybody knows how much I loved to play there. Sometimes I look over at it from Emirates Stadium because it has a view over the old ground and I feel sad. I wanted Highbury to stay exactly like it was. Emirates Stadium is an amazing ground, with great facilities and a fantastic

pitch. But for 93 years Arsenal played at Highbury, and it's going to take something special to top that."

It was dark by now. A cold, damp night, but young Jake was oblivious to the bad weather as he stood transfixed while his idol strolled out to his car, hopped inside like James Bond and raced off into the enfolding blackness. "Well, what was it like then, meeting Thierry Henry?" he was asked. He paused for just a moment, then his face showed a huge grin. "Good ... really good."

## **Postscript**

On June 25, 2007, it was all change. From Arsenal red to Barca blue. Thierry Henry walked on to the Camp Nou pitch in front of 35,000 roaring fans. The final chapter in a protracted story. It was a long goodbye.

Henry left, it transpired, with Arsène Wenger's blessing and while Arsenal fans contemplated the departure of their record-breaking striker, the trust in the manager's decision transcended even the sense of loss of one so miraculously gifted.

Henry himself struck a typically sensitive note of hope and regret: "Barcelona are a wonderful club, steeped in tradition and play beautiful football, but I will miss the Arsenal fans dearly. They have supported me through thick and thin. They will always be in my heart. I will always have a bond with Arsenal Football Club."

The manager himself paid a fulsome tribute to his former leader. "It was Thierry's decision to leave but he goes with my blessing. Personally, I'd like to thank him for the huge contribution he has made to the Club's success over the past eight years. To his credit he has mixed skill and style together with an appetite for winning."

That was the prevailing mood. One of Arsenal's finest players walked away, not to accusations of betrayal, but to a sense of deep-seated and heartfelt gratitude.

**Sue Mott**

## INTERVIEW

# **Minder in the middle**

**For almost a decade Patrick Vieira was Arsenal's powerful midfield enforcer, a human dynamo who drove the team ever onwards while ensuring they were always secure at the back**

Maybe it's because he was a Londoner for nine years, but when Patrick Vieira left Arsenal for Juventus in 2005, he took a little piece of the capital with him. He is driving it now, his Bentley with personalised number plates, down the three-lane Italian motorway that leads from the secluded Inter Milan training ground to his temporary home in a luscious five-star downtown Milanese hotel. He is a good driver. Better than some we could mention. Do mention, in fact, amid screams, as two frenetic black sports cars chase each other, weaving in and out of the moving traffic, at speeds which smack of astronomical stupidity. The drivers must be insane. Arsenal's former captain suppresses a gentle smile. "I think," he says cautiously, "they are two of my team-mates."

Here speaks Captain Sensible. Older, wiser, more mature than he often seemed on the Highbury pitch, at once his stage and his naughty step. He was fabulous. He was in trouble. Those two facts often went together – as did he and Arsène Wenger, to many FA disciplinary hearings. But he was young, passionate and unused to the British way of doing things. He progressed from excitable juvenility to be captain of the great Arsenal team that went a whole season undefeated. His penalty won the 2005 FA Cup Final against Manchester United. He was part of two extraordinary Arsenal League and FA Cup Doubles. He was quite something. He eventually left Highbury for Turin with no regrets, but he remembers the old place with huge fondness. He was happy there. He was made there. There's no doubt that meeting Arsenal and Arsène Wenger was the sporting turning point of his life.

"I was on the bench for my first game, against Sheffield Wednesday. I came on and I was quite impressed by the atmosphere in the stadium, it was so exciting. When you looked at Highbury from the outside, you didn't know what to expect. It looked really small among those little houses. But when you were in the stadium, you realised how special it was. Through the years I spent there, I really do understand why Highbury was so special for the Club. I am not surprised everybody cried when it closed because Highbury had such a history behind it.

"I don't know what the fans thought when they saw this really tall guy with his long legs do his warm-up. They maybe asked where he was coming from. But I think I really did win the hearts of the fans. The relationship got stronger

and stronger." Vieira, in person, is physically imposing, exquisitely dressed (he knows far more about the clothes shops in Milan than his wife), and quaintly polite. His mother, Rose, instilled good manners in her two boys. For a man reputed to have an explosive temper on the pitch, in civilian life he is positively gentle: it would not be a surprise to learn he breeds kittens in his spare time. He laughs easily. He readily reminisces about his life and times at Highbury, the formative years of his career. "I wasn't the first Frenchman to do well in English football. Eric Cantona had done well. David Ginola did well. He was soft, but he did well with his talent. But on the pitch I showed that I had a spirit similar to the fans. I showed that, even though I was French, I could play with English spirit."

There is Africa in his soul, too. Born in Senegal, he moved with his mother and brother to France when he was eight. "She decided to move to get a better job and have a better life. I never knew my dad, so my mother was both a mother and father to me. She is very strong and ambitious. There is no doubt about where I get my strength from. We came to France, in Dreux, and we started to play football. I was playing in the street with friends when I was asked if I wanted to join a club. My mother came to Highbury when I was at Arsenal to watch me play. She was quite impressed by the atmosphere. She was impressed, too, by the songs – especially the one of my name.

"I was not a naughty boy. Like every kid, I did some bad things, but the education I received from my mother was very good. When I had the opportunity to be a football player, she said just take it. But I always remember where I come from, in Senegal, because it is important to me to be African. When I was young, maybe not so much, but now I understand how important it is to know more about my background, about Africa because I grew up there. It taught me never to give up and how you have to fight for what you get. Going back to Senegal a few years ago, I realised they do not have as many things as in the West, but they are very happy with the way they live their life; it is quite impressive. We are used to having things in the West and if we don't have them, we complain too much. As a footballer, we travel a lot. We have our eyes opened and we see how lucky we are. We are really lucky because we follow our passion and we have a chance to make a lot of money."

In September 1996, aged 20, Vieira turned up at Highbury on his telescopic legs and the fans wondered who on Earth he was. Wenger had not even arrived yet and already he was sending tall young Frenchmen into the Club as his advance guard. It was a mystery: why did the new Arsenal manager feel so strongly about a boy who had been languishing in the AC Milan reserves, having played only twice for the first team? Answers were quickly supplied upon his

Highbury debut, as his commitment, pace, strength, skill, determination and ferocious tackling were all on show for the first time.

We know what Wenger thought of Vieira, so what did Vieira think of Wenger? "I had a really good feeling. I was from Milan where I didn't play so much and I was only 20. He knew me better than I knew him, of course. He really believed in me. He had confidence in my game and in me as a person. When you are a young player especially, the talent may be there, but what you really need is a manager who will believe in you even if you play one bad game, or two, or three. I think Arsène has that for all the young players. It was totally the opposite in Milan because I was playing with so many great players in the first team – Paolo Maldini, Franco Baresi, Zvonimir Boban, Marcel Desailly, Paulo Futre, George Weah – and during that period you were only allowed three foreign players on the pitch. I was at the end of the queue, but it was good for me because I learned a lot from being near such players. It was difficult because you always want to play when you are young, but on the other hand those players made me grow up quicker.

"When I went to Highbury, I knew I would have to prove myself on the pitch. I didn't know anything about England, I didn't know anything about London. It was the first time I'd ever been. The weather was terrible, but I quite liked it! Nobody really bothered you, because Londoners get on with their own lives. There was so much to do. It was great. I lived in Hampstead which had great restaurants. I went to the theatre once, a musical, though I can't remember what it was. I went to the cinema, to the market to get fruit – I cook myself. I left home when I was 16, I think, so I am quite independent. Arsène is really strict about food. But I did not always eat good things. Not really. I think there is no problem with food until you stop playing."

Yet apart from diet, the weather and finding a house in Hampstead, there were other matters for the young Vieira to address. Namely, his discipline. There was a myth in English football, perhaps perpetuated by the delicacy with which Ginola posed for hair commercials (as well as playing for Tottenham Hotspur and Newcastle United), that Frenchmen were essentially gentle souls. Admittedly, Cantona had dented this vision with an assault on a sledging fan at Crystal Palace; nevertheless, this was pre-World Cup 1998, when France became the World Champions, and the misguided view prevailed. Vieira debunked the myth in an instant. He was sent off nine times in his 358 games for Arsenal. "It was a part of my game. Not to get booked, but to be strong, to win the ball. I think the spirit I had to win the ball was all right. My job was to win the ball and distribute it. Sometimes I was arriving a little bit late. I don't say I didn't deserve all the red and yellow cards, but I never went to hurt fellow players. The

problem was the way I was reacting. If I got the red cards because of the way I tried to win the ball, it would have been OK in my mind. But I could not accept that I got the red cards because of the way I was reacting.

"I was young and I didn't understand the English game yet. In England when you are fouled, you should not react. I took time to understand that. I reacted a little bit too quickly to the provocation and all the opposition players knew about it and played on it. I took time to learn to control myself. Arsène sat me down and talked to me, of course. He didn't want me to change my commitment: that's a part of me, that's what he liked about me. But he said the way I was reacting had to change.

"I matured. What is sad about it, is that you always learn from your mistakes – you don't learn before. The mistakes I made forced me to grow up as a player and a human being."

He was clearly in earnest, though his argument was slightly spoiled by the fact that he was sent off twice before Christmas playing for Inter.

Even so, he was a crucial part of Arsenal's transformation: from George Graham's emphasis on rigour (some might have added the word 'moris' by 1995) to Wenger's passion for beauty. But the incoming Arsenal manager knew a good thing when he saw it, in this case the Arsenal defence. Despite their great age, David Seaman, Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould – later replaced by Martin Keown – and Nigel Winterburn were retained: an English brick wall behind a foreign legion of ball players. It worked. "It helped that the atmosphere in the team was really good," Vieira says. "Culturally, in the locker room, we got on really, really all right. The English bring the desire and the way that they fight for 90 minutes. It doesn't matter if they are injured, they will always keep going 100 per cent. The foreigners brought the football culture: the passing, the movement, the technique. The mixture of all of this gave Arsenal one of the best years ever. The football had everything: passion, desire, movement, technique.

"It was really good in training. I had battles with Keown. Adams would tackle me in training – of course. Dennis Bergkamp brought his magic. When you were young, next to them, you take a little bit of everybody. Sometimes we played foreigners against the English and nobody wanted to lose the game. We brought that intensity on to the pitch."

It was said that Arsenal's unstoppable assault on the Double in 1998 was the result of a Christmas time "discussion" between the British players and the foreigners, when stern views were aired about effort and commitment. "Mmmmm, I don't quite remember that, but it is possible. Because during Christmas time in all the other countries we had come from there is a break. So it might have been harder for us to get focused around that time. Over the years, I



learned how important that period was, they made us understand that.

"It felt really, really good to win the Double that year. They always say the first is the best and it was, looking back. The atmosphere in the stadium on that last game of the season against Everton was fantastic, unbelievable. And, of course, when we went for the tour on the bus around Highbury afterwards – I still have the video of that. Unbelievable numbers of people in the street. I never expected to see so many people. Fantastic. Even Arsène allowed us to have one glass of champagne or a few beers that night. Then we won another Double. That was really special as well.

"I became captain of the 'Invincible' team of 2003/2004. What made us really strong was that we went on the pitch knowing we were going to win the game. Our self-belief and our belief in each other was really high so even if we were 1-0 down, we weren't panicking at all; we knew we were going to win. It was pure belief. We knew we were going to score. We had fantastic players like Dennis and anything could happen. That's why the spirit of the Club was so good because everyone accepted remarks from everyone else – good things and bad things. We accepted criticism if it was for the good of the team. Saying the truth only helped the team to get better. That's why the team was really special. But we had fun, too. I loved Dennis, he was funny. People who don't know Dennis think he is really quiet and reserved, that he's shy, but he's not at all. He's the one who made me laugh a lot. Him and Keown. They said funny things. If somebody was coming in wearing very strange clothes, we would hang them in the middle of the dressing room and make a joke of it.

"When I look back at that team, I think what we achieved is really hard in modern football, to go the whole season unbeaten. It is difficult to realise how well we did. In the next 10-15 years we will realise, because I don't think it will happen again soon."

Frustratingly, annoyingly, the run of 49 games without defeat ended at Old Trafford, of all places. Vieira had endured many passionate encounters with Manchester United. "I really liked the rivalry between the two clubs even though it could be like a battle on the pitch. That pushes you to win. You had the local rivalry with Tottenham Hotspur that was really special, but outside of that I think our biggest opposition was Manchester United. We were the best teams of that period. In my entire nine years at Arsenal, every game against them was memorable. They had passion, emotion, everything. I was on the pitch that time when Ruud van Nistleroy missed a penalty at the end and the game became a battle. But I was good. I didn't get into trouble."

Vieira also scored the penalty in the shoot-out that beat United in the 2005 Cup Final. It was his last competitive kick in English football. "It was our worst

game against Manchester United, but you don't have to play well to win in football. United were by far the best team, they created so many chances that I still don't know how they didn't score. We thought it wasn't our day, but we defended really well. We knew the only chance we had was to take them to penalties so I wasn't nervous taking my penalty. Jens Lehmann did really well that game; he should have been Man of the Match. That's why when I scored I went straightaway to Jens. I like his personality, the way he expresses himself. He is a really passionate human being. That's part of the character of being a goalkeeper. If you see him, ask him how come he's such a bad loser, he was the worst loser in the locker room, always moaning. Even in training he does not accept defeat. You need a few players like that in your team. I was a bad loser, too, but I would not be cross the next day."

Team-building was vital at Arsenal, but even within that framework it was obvious that Thierry Henry was something special. Vieira, a fellow France international, was his room-mate. "I know him well. When he first arrived at Arsenal he had quite a difficult period for a few months. He couldn't score, but Arsène knew he had the potential to be a great striker. And now he's the best Arsenal scorer ever. What I really like about him was that he worked hard to get where he is now." They say you never really know a man until you share a room with him. So did Thierry snore? "Ha! That is private, but I will tell you that he is someone who goes to bed really late. I used to tell him to shut off the TV or his DVD because I wanted to go to bed. He was tidy, like me. He likes a joke. I think he learned to be cool over time – that came with confidence. He believes in himself so much, he doesn't have to play well to score goals. He knows if he has a small chance it will go in the net. He is a different sort of captain from me. We are quite different anyway as people."

Henry was installed as Arsenal Club captain when Vieira left for Juventus. His destination was a surprise, given the repeated siren calls from Real Madrid during his latter days at Highbury. To the player, transformed from Senegalese boy to World Cup winner under Wenger's tutelage, it was a career move and a wrench simultaneously. "I had been there quite a long time. It was really difficult to leave – I didn't expect it to be that difficult. I'm not talking only about the players, but the Club in general. The people working at the training ground, the chef, everyone. I had a good relationship with all of them. It was like leaving family, Arsenal was like a family and all of that made it really special.

"But when you get – not old – but in your 30s, and you have a big club interested in you, you have to think about it. It was true I was close to Madrid, but in the end I decided to stay at Arsenal. It is like having a long-time girlfriend and then discovering you are asked out by Miss World. You may go to Miss

World, but you have been with your girlfriend quite a few years. Do you want a one-night stand or life with your girlfriend? I made the decision straightaway to stay with Arsenal.

"As for going to Italy, I'd been at Arsenal for nine years and been really happy when we were successful and really sad about not winning trophies. The only thing I missed with Arsenal was the Champions League. But it was time for me to go and experience something else. You can say, why leave when you are so happy? But it's a decision you make and it's difficult to guess how it will turn out. I don't regret it. I always stick to decisions I make. It doesn't mean I don't like Arsenal. I still go to watch them play. I went to the Champions League group game against CSKA Moscow, I sat in Dennis's box at the new stadium – I still speak to Dennis once or twice a week. I think the new stadium is really good, fantastic. From a commercial point of view, it was really important to move, the Club just need time to get the atmosphere in the stadium because people still have Highbury in their mind. Football fans are sentimental. In time, people will understand."

Vieira's last visit to Highbury could not be described as a sentimental occasion: Arsenal v Juventus in the Champions League quarter-final. The home side won 2-0 with Vieira's teenage replacement, Francesc Fabregas, scoring one of the goals, while two Italian players were sent off and Robert Pires, of all people, made a shuddering tackle on his former Arsenal captain, which shook Highbury (and Vieira) to its disbelieving core. "I didn't expect it to be such a difficult time. My emotions took their toll on my concentration, you know. I lost my focus a little bit. I had not expected to come back to Highbury so soon. Being there, seeing all the people I'd been working with ... it was definitely difficult.

"I spoke to the players, of course. In fact, I was on the phone to some of them on the coach on the way to the stadium. It was like I'd never been away. It was too soon. Too soon." And then there was that Pires tackle. Vieira is big enough, brave enough, to laugh uproariously at the memory. "We had a laugh about it after the game. From Arsenal's point of view it was a perfect game. It amazed me that they got all the way to the Champions League Final. No one expected that."

Vieira watched the game against Barcelona on television. "I spoke to Thierry and Dennis to wish them luck, and to Arsène as well. But it wasn't to be. I think if they had kept 11 on the pitch, instead of Jens being sent off, they would have had a chance." He felt for Wenger, his former manager and mentor, after Arsenal's defeat. "We had a really good relationship. If we leave the football aspect out, he made me grow up as a human being. He stretched me to face the good things and the bad things and to take responsibility for my actions. I still

Speak to him once in a while."

There is an evident fondness in Vieira for his life and times at Highbury. Looking back, he can see that it was an era of, aptly, towering achievement. From the moment he bonded with fellow Frenchman Emmanuel Petit, to produce the most productive midfield unit in English football, he was adored by the Highbury faithful. He won three Premiership titles, four FA Cups to add to his international achievements of the 1998 World Cup and the 2000 European Championships. Only when he left Arsenal did events not go entirely to plan. After one year at Juventus, the Italian club were engulfed by a match-fixing scandal that relegated them to Serie B. That descent sparked Vieira's move to Inter Milan, which explained his temporary accommodation in a hotel with his wife and her daughter.

Life moves on. But no ties were severed: the family still own their house in Hampstead and expect to move back to London one day. They remain great friends with the Bergkamps, who also stayed in London when Dennis retired. Just as the Double-winning side of 1971 were forever organising reunions amongst themselves, it seems that Highbury fostered another bonded unit in Wenger's boys of the 21st century.

"A little piece of me will be forever Arsenal," Vieira says. "Highbury was part of my life. I spent nine years there. I arrived there a boy and I left there a man. That is true."

**Sue Mott**

## INTERVIEW

**We've got Dennis Bergkamp**

**From the moment Dennis Bergkamp arrived at Arsenal everything changed: not just the way football was played, but fans' expectations of what they were going to see...**

By joining Arsenal in 1995, Dennis Bergkamp unwittingly managed to achieve something seminal. By just being himself, by bringing his prodigious talent to bear on the playing fields of England, Bergkamp was largely responsible for a seismic shift in expectation levels, not just at Highbury, but across the country as a whole.

Once the princely Dutchman had displayed his wares to disbelieving audiences across the land, once his incomparable skills became as much part of the scene as a crunching Tony Adams tackle, there was no going back for those privy to the pageant. People would no longer settle for merely 'good' when they had seen what 'superb' could do to the pulse. Time had moved on and so had the demands, thanks to Bergkamp's brilliant machinations with the ball at his feet.

A heavenly touch, extraordinary vision, a sublime range of passing, plus a compendium of wonderful goals: who could be sated by milk after this taste of Ambrosia? Not Arsenal. Not Arsène Wenger. With the bar raised to an unprecedented height, anyone fancying a jump needed a spring in his heels.

Bergkamp, to all intents and purposes, was the trailblazer at Arsenal. Without him, the likes of Patrick Vieira, Nicolas Anelka, Marc Overmars, Emmanuel Petit, Robert Pires – even Thierry Henry – might not have been so inclined to head to London N5. They had, after all, seen their predecessor arrive as the first genuine overseas superstar to be beguiled by Highbury. Before him, the feisty fireworks accompanying most tussles in this country, the muck-and-bullets attitude that has prevailed down the years, tended to discourage the so-called foreign 'Fancy Dans'.

Eric Cantona, granted, might have already become a Manchester United legend by the time of Bergkamp's arrival, but to arrive at that point the mercurial Frenchman had slipped through the sidedoor via Leeds United as an unknown quantity. Bergkamp, on the other hand, was bought at considerable cost from Inter Milan having become a huge name already as a result of his success with Ajax and Holland.

In order to understand the player that arrived at Arsenal and the one he subsequently became, you have to listen to Bergkamp talk about those formative years at Ajax, the prodigious football factory where so many great talents were originally moulded. From a very early age, the chief aim was clear. "The

motivation was always making the first team," he says. "The youth team pitch was right next to De Meer [Ajax's ground until 1996]. We were always taught to work hard, do our best, and one day we might end up playing in that stadium. After every season we were told who could stay and who had to go. They told you to leave if you weren't good enough; that kept you motivated."

Yet the local boy knew nothing back then of the role that would later define his sparkling career. At Ajax he had come through the youth ranks as an orthodox right-winger rather than as an inspired architect mapping out moves in the middle. When the first team eventually beckoned, his manager, Johan Cruyff, didn't expect anything unusual.

"My job was to go past the defender and get in a cross and then stop him from going past me. That was basically it. Playing in that position, there was nothing more to it," Bergkamp says. It even brought some reward in 1987 when a side built around Marco van Basten and Frank Rijkaard won the European Cup Winners' Cup with a 17-year-old substitute haring up the flank.

Within two years, though, Bergkamp had been moved infield. "I started to play as the shadow striker. That gave me more possibilities, more responsibilities – and more goals." Yes, more goals. Bergkamp's ratio for Ajax was prolific (more than a goal every other game), largely thanks to the fact that the side was being built around its number 10, with everything geared to freeing up space for the side's chief goalscorer. "I had a great relationship with my strike partner, Stefan Pettersson," he says. "He wasn't there for himself: he was basically there for me, creating space by dragging his defender out of the way. A lot of my goals came because of him.

"The player directly behind me was sometimes Jan Wouters, but most of the time it was Wim Jonk, who gave me the passes. It was all based on a little bit of eye contact before the pass came. It's a matter of practising together. But as soon as you get to know each other, that's all it takes – a little bit of eye contact. He looks up, I know exactly what he wants, where he wants me to go and that's it, I'm off to receive the pass. Done right, it's impossible to defend against."

Many defenders in England would sympathise with that sentiment, with the only difference being that at Arsenal it was usually Bergkamp fulfilling the Wouters or Jonk role. Over time, a subtle change occurred. He had started to derive more satisfaction from acting as provider, finding space and possibilities in a more withdrawn position. His creative bent began to compete with his hunger for goals as those incisive through-balls became part of the scenery.

Think of those devastating passes into Ian Wright's path, invariably buried by the irrepressible hitman. The run, the pass, the finish – it all looked so wonderfully simple from up in the stand, but success depended totally on two



master craftsmen staying in tune with each other – not easy when you are talking about someone as unpredictable as Wright. "Yes, it could be hard to find him sometimes, but he started to make things more simple by standing still for a fraction of a second longer, letting me know where he wanted the ball. Slowly our relationship became better because of that. The way he could score goals from anywhere – that's an unbelievable skill. I was there to help him, but he could do a lot by himself. For me it was a joy to watch that from close by. I certainly didn't have that ability."

Maybe he didn't. Or maybe he simply chose to head in a different direction. Certainly, many people in Holland have accused Bergkamp down the years of lacking the killer touch. Detractors pick holes in the player's perceived preference for beauty over simplicity. Yet equally there are people in Bergkamp's homeland who regard him as an art form – someone who should be admired and studied for his poetic beauty. Jeroen Henneman, an eminent Dutch sculptor, has been known to draw detailed sketches of a Bergkamp pass, illustrating how the striker curves the ball cleverly around helpless defenders and into the path of his intended target. "One moment the pitch is crowded and narrow," Henneman enthuses. "Suddenly it is huge and wide."

In his keen adoration, this man is by no means alone. Dr Rob Ruurs, from the University of Amsterdam's Art Institute, for example, talks reverentially about Bergkamp's subtle qualities. "Among most of my colleagues there is a view that someone like Dennis Bergkamp is certainly a great artist. It is to do with his use of space." Ruurs and his academic colleagues consider the blond visionary is someone who understands perfectly the geometry of a football pitch, whose grasp of 'spacial awareness' affords special advantages denied to the majority.

For an explanation, Bergkamp reflects on his early days at Ajax, where another masterful exponent of time and space instructed the youngsters on the game's finer principles. "Cruyff used to say that when you're young, you only see part of the pitch [Bergkamp holds his hands either side of his face to denote tunnel vision.] But when you get older the picture widens and you see more things. With experience you see players making more runs. You see things happening before they happen, you know? If that's connected to a good through-ball, then it can all come together."

Arsenal supporters, of course, know exactly what he means. They watched in awe over the course of several seasons as their chief playmaker sliced defences in two with an inspirational flick or a majestic sweep. Never before had they seen such brilliance: not even when the great Liam Brady was playing in his pomp. One sign of greatness is being able to adapt to different styles and Bergkamp proved beyond doubt that he could do just that. After Wright, he

learnt to dovetail smoothly, first with Anelka, then Henry and, in a slight variation on a theme, the dashing Freddie Ljungberg.

Anelka, in particular, has Bergkamp to thank for many of his goals. Likewise, the supplier hungrily seized on the Frenchman's devastating pace to showcase his own talents. It was an avenue of attack too good to pass up. "His pace made things very simple for me," Bergkamp says. "I put the ball over the top and no one could stop him. It was just a matter of keeping him onside and getting the ball into his path."

Sheer pace also played a major part in the man's dealings with Henry. Yet Bergkamp soon discovered that any kind of service would usually do the trick. "Thierry, for me, is one of the most complete footballers I've ever played with. You can play the ball behind the defenders for him because he's got the pace, but you can play it to his feet as well because he's got the skill and strength. He is so complete, and basically can do a lot by himself by beating two or three defenders on his own. It doesn't matter how he gets the ball. Just do it. He makes it look very simple, but we all know it's very hard."

A little more complex, if no less devastating, was the relationship with Ljungberg, perhaps his most enduring at Highbury. With the elusive Swede cutting in from the right flank at an incredible pace, while timing his darting runs to perfection, the angles involved were slightly different. Nevertheless, it was an enthralling sight as the two worked perfectly in tandem to prise open back doors. "That's very hard to deal with for a defender," Bergkamp says. "A left-back wouldn't follow Freddie all the way and a centre-half wouldn't be able to pick him up." The ploy worked countless times. Defenders knew what was coming, but the link-up was so fast that they were helpless to respond.

Picking out the best example from many isn't easy, but perhaps the most spectacular link-up, although slightly different from the norm, came against Juventus in December 2001, on a stirring Highbury night in the Champions League. This was Bergkamp in his prime, at his ridiculous best. Two twists and a turn, a lightening-quick drag back and the deftest of flicks proved more than enough to flummox two Juve defenders. Ljungberg made it all seem worthwhile with a typically clinical finish. Thinking back, Bergkamp remembers this moment with a fond nod. He also recalls how he arrived at such a place – a level of excellence that very few players can match. "Those through-balls are just a matter of practice. A lot of it has to do with the pace of the ball. Anyone can play a ball between two defenders, but you've got to judge the pace right. If you do, it's a great ball, otherwise it looks like nothing. On a wet pitch, on a dry pitch – it's all different. It's about getting a feel for the ball, not only on the floor, but in the air, too. You pick out a spot where you want the ball to go, knowing the

player will be there at the right time. If he doesn't go, then of course there's no point. You've got to have a certain understanding with a player. It was the same with Ashley Cole. People didn't expect him to run in behind defenders, but I knew he would go there and he knew I would give him the ball. It's a combination of everything. Sometimes you can just do it after hearing a shout, without looking up, but I always felt more confident when I could actually see the player."

Yet that kind of intuition doesn't happen straightaway in a match. Bergkamp himself gets there by gradually raising his ambitions. "I always think of the basics – first of all, find another player. When you know that you're playing OK, that you're in the game, then you can introduce some risk and try to find players in a certain way. If that goes OK, then you can put in even more risk to your game."

When I try to pin him down on his favourite assist for Arsenal, he mentally works his way through an extensive back-catalogue before making a choice that many other people might have forgotten. "The one that sums it up for me was against Middlesbrough [in December 2001], when I set up Ashley [Cole] for a header. I was tucked in on the right side of the pitch and he just came out of nowhere; I curled it over the top of the defenders and he headed it in the goal. That was the decider, I think, and we won the game. That's what it's all about – creating something out of nothing and making it count."

For this expertise, we must appreciate his work on the training ground, where his attention to detail was second to none. He could often be seen practising out on the pitch, long after his team-mates had wandered off for a shower, hitting volleys and half-volleys into an empty net, controlling the ball different ways with either foot – whatever it took to keep his technique razor sharp. It proved a marvellous example to those watching. If a senior craftsman such as Bergkamp felt the need to practise, less gifted team-mates could have no excuse. Repetition, repetition – a mantra for success and a worthy legacy. "I didn't practise because I was told to, but because I've always liked doing it," he says. "Since I was 12, at Ajax, it was all about being there with the ball, trying shots, passes and tricks. After training, too. It was a regular part of my day."

Bergkamp's relationship with goalscoring changed down the years. On a personal level, it became slightly less important to score, so long as the team were doing well. "I feel there should always be a player around at the front who can create things. I got so much enjoyment out of that. As you get older, the drive becomes stronger to work for the team, to create things rather than just score goals. I'm not selfish enough just to think about goals, goals, goals. Scoring will always be the main thing. But – and I've mentioned this to a few of

the younger lads – as you get older you think less of your own performance and more of the team's.

"When I first joined Ajax I wasn't thinking about winning the league or winning a cup. I was thinking about my own performance – about playing on a Saturday and showing everyone my skills. As an older player, though, you're thinking more about how important it is that the team wins something during the season. You're thinking about what's better for the team."

However, despite highlighting the gradual shift in his footballing career, as he became Arsenal's masterly provider, Bergkamp will probably be remembered best for his amazing collection of goals, so stunning in quality that they often took one's breath away. Ask Bergkamp for his own appraisal and he will always put his goals into the context of their importance. That's a key part: pulling something out of the bag when it's needed most. That's why he always mentions one particular effort in the quarter-final of the 1998 World Cup, when his sublime piece of control killed a long ball and a glorious finish knocked Argentina out of the competition. Talking of the goal, he says: "You often say to yourself: 'I could have done better', but with this goal I would never have been able to do it better."

Less than 12 months before, he had scored a similar goal in Arsenal's Premiership game at Filbert Street to complete a fine hat-trick against Leicester City. The instantaneous control, the nimble shifting of feet, the elegant sweep. Vintage finishing, too. This was Bergkamp in his prime. "That season I scored a lot of goals with the inside of my right foot – bending the ball around the keeper into the far corner. That was a big part of that season for me." It was arguably his best season, too. He scored 22 goals to help Arsenal claim the League and Cup Double, and won both the Professional Footballers' Association Player of the Year and the Football Writers' Association Player of the Year awards.

Yet perhaps the most audacious example among his impressive tally of goals came one day at Newcastle in 2002. After a Robert Pires pass had found him on the edge of the box with his back to goal, what happened next seemed to defy football physics. After a subtle flick with his left boot, Bergkamp quickly spun around, and as the ball floated past one side of his marker, Nikos Dabizas, he glided past on the other. It was a move that totally flummoxed the defender and led to Bergkamp somehow facing the goal with the ball at his feet. With the hard bit done, he comfortably held off the challenge of Dabizas before slotting the ball past a helpless Shay Given. At first glance, the flick didn't look intentional, but this was Bergkamp: on his day, nothing seemed out of reach. Bobby Robson, Newcastle United's manager, agreed. "You can't blame anyone for that," he said. "You just have to accept that Bergkamp did a beautiful thing."

What a welcome change all this made to the player's unhappy two-year stint with Inter Milan. Cruyff hadn't wanted him to leave Ajax in the first place and Bergkamp, once ensconced at the San Siro, soon saw why. Italy's catenaccio culture, with its emphasis on defence and tactical fouls, didn't sit comfortably with the Dutchman's attacking ideals. "Coming from Ajax it was the complete opposite of the way I'd been brought up," Bergkamp says. "I came from a culture where you played one-touch football and always looked for each other. My strike partner at Inter, Ruben Sosa, would just shoot from anywhere without trying to pass. I thought: 'This isn't football. We should be playing together'. It took me a while to understand that this might be the only option for a striker in Italy – to shoot from distance because you couldn't get near the goal. It was good for my development, but very difficult at the time."

Bergkamp also found the intense media interest, which led to constant attention, hard to accept. He remembers with a smile how such scrutiny spilled over one day into his home life. "The media wanted to know things about my private life and I refused. I went home and then went out with my wife. But while we were out, the press came to my house and were talking to the neighbours and to the gardener to try to find out things. Everyone who knows me knows that I'm prepared to talk about football, but I'm not going to talk about my private life because that's why it's called 'private'. I want to protect that."

He has succeeded in guarding this side of his life, too, for few people outside his inner circle know much about the real Bergkamp, the person 'beneath' the supreme footballer. The Club's supporters could see the 'Iceman' performing on the pitch, and hear him give interviews with intelligence and honesty, but were never party to his dry humour and the biting wit, which formed a crucial part of the dressing room scene for so many years. On that score, Arsenal's number 10 could hold his own among the best. If any joking was required, Bergkamp was always on hand to oblige: that's partly what attracted him to England in the first place. He knew the culture and humour were very similar to Holland's.

This familiarity dates back to his summers as a child, coming over on holiday: Cornwall, the south coast, London – as committed Anglophiles his family would visit them all. As Manchester United fans, what's more, Bergkamp's parents had named their son Dennis after the great Denis Law, adding an extra 'n' to avoid comparisons with the girl's name Denise. His life was immersed in football right from the start. "On Saturdays and Sundays I'd go along to watch my three brothers play and I'd kick a ball about on the sidelines. My father played as well in the old five-striker system. He was an inside right."

The young Bergkamp, for his part, worshipped Tottenham Hotspur's Glenn

Hodde. It seemed pre-ordained that Bergkamp would, at some point, ply his trade in England. "In my time the route from Holland was always to Spain or Italy first: England was never mentioned. For me, it was different. I always had a connection with English football. I don't know why. I went to Inter knowing that I would go to England afterwards. I signed a contract for four years at Inter, but after two it hadn't worked out. Once I told my agent I wanted to try England, contact with Arsenal was made and the deal was done within a week."

Despite his knowledge of the country and his sobering experiences with the Italian press, the new signing was still taken by surprise by how much interest the English media took in his failure to score in the opening seven games. Holed up in a hotel during those first few months, he didn't read the English papers. Thoughtfully, his team-mates also kept quiet about the growing speculation. Then one sunny September afternoon at Highbury he broke his duck with two goals against Southampton. "Someone from my family bought the papers afterwards and I couldn't believe the fuss. I asked around the lads and they said: 'Yeah, you got hammered over the last few weeks because you didn't score. We didn't want to tell you'."

Looking back now, he remembers the reaction from the home crowd. "I could feel their relief. They were celebrating, but there was a lot of relief in there as well. Not in a cynical way, more in a protective way. They really wanted me to score that goal. It was very important for me, too. I really see that as the start of my Arsenal career. People had already seen that I could play football, but scoring is different. That was the moment."

Eight months later, a stunning strike from the edge of the box against Bolton Wanderers signed off his debut campaign and, significantly, helped clinch a Uefa Cup slot for Bruce Rioch's team.

Bergkamp had enjoyed a very good relationship with Rioch so he naturally felt sad when his manager was sacked five days before the start of the following season. For someone who thought he had left the instability of hirings and firings behind in Italy, it all came as a shock. "That was a strange period for me. I didn't know what to expect. You start to think of your own career. We were completely in the dark. The Arsenal board kept saying: 'No, relax, relax, there's a new coach coming in and it will all change. Trust us'. Then word slowly seeped through about the new appointment."

Unlike some players, Bergkamp knew a little bit about his next boss. "I had heard of him from Monaco. At Ajax we were compared a lot to Arsène Wenger's side because they played in a 4-3-3 formation as well – in a similar attacking style." Yet the opening few weeks of the new season must have felt pretty strange. First Stewart Houston and then Pat Rice took charge in a caretaker

capacity while Wenger saw out his obligations at Nagoya Grampus Eight in Japan.

"You were always wondering if the boss was watching up in the stand. If not, could he see the games on television in Japan?" Then something happened to put minds at rest: Patrick Vieira arrived as Wenger's first major signing. "As soon as Patrick came in, you could see the change in the team. He was a different sort of football player. I really thought that, from then on, all the other players stepped their game up as well. We didn't know Patrick. We had never heard of him, in fact, but he came on at half-time against Sheffield Wednesday at Highbury and completely changed the game. That's when you realise that the person responsible for bringing in someone like this must really be knowledgeable about football."

And then some. Once in place, Wenger introduced methods that made his new charges think. "The training sessions were different," Bergkamp says. "We worked a lot with mannequins and practised shadow play. He was just trying to put in place a way of playing and getting everyone used to it. The right-back passes to the right winger, the right-back overlaps – all those movements, repeating them over and over again. We kept doing that for months at the start so that everyone knew a different way of playing. The whole team was there on the pitch and we'd practise a lot of moves around the mannequins. He was so calm with everything. He introduced recovery days when you'd just stay indoors and do stretching. Straight away it seemed more professional, like we were really making a nice job out of this. Before Arsène came, a double session meant we were finished by about 1.30pm. Now we would have a session in the morning, have lunch, rest for two hours, then start the second session at three. We started stretching before games at the hotel. Somehow it all makes you think more about your game, about the task coming up."

Apart from the changes in diet and training, Wenger's methods in the dressing room also came as something new. Even if the team had played terribly, the manager would say virtually nothing, leaving it up to the players to work it out for themselves. This contrasted sharply with the responses of Rioch and, before him, George Graham, who both pointed the finger of blame in no uncertain terms. "That has never happened with him [Wenger]," Bergkamp says. "He never mentioned one person. It could be that he sees that as a skill, I don't know, or he just doesn't have that in him."

Someone who definitely did like a rant was Louis van Gaal, one of Bergkamp's managers at Ajax. "He was in your face screaming: even the day after a game he would carry on. We would always have a meeting and he'd get out his piece of paper that he'd been writing on during the match and have a real

go at certain players in front of everyone. He'd get more and more angry. That was his thing. He liked one-on-one confrontation, whereas managers like Wenger aren't comfortable doing that. Over the years, though, he did become more vocal when he was sitting on the bench. He'd have a go at the fourth official or the linesman. I think that's just because of the English game and the people around him. It affects you."

It certainly affected Bergkamp. In fact, the English game got under his skin to such an extent that in the end he couldn't envisage playing anywhere else. If Ajax was his first love, Arsenal was the loyal wife he couldn't divorce, the longstanding partner with whom he shared the golden years, the best of his career. In David Winner's book, *Those Feet*, the author Nick Hornby explains his own view of Bergkamp. "When Dennis arrived, he exposed something about England," Hornby says. "It's as if you're watching a film with special effects, where everything is very small, and it's fine as long as they keep the cameraman out of the picture ... but then 'oh, they're only an inch tall'." In other words, everyone else was dwarfed by the size of the Dutch master's talent. His entrance put the achievements of his predecessors into sharp perspective.

Agree or disagree with those sentiments: it was Hornby's way of describing Bergkamp's magnitude as one of the most gifted footballers ever to grace these shores. His impact, as a result, stretches far beyond any tribal ties, to leave the English public in general, and Arsenal fans in particular, with a new yardstick.

Could he possibly have expected so much upon arriving in London? For that matter, could the aspiring schoolboy at Ajax ever have foreseen what was to come? "First of all the dream was to become a professional footballer. When you've achieved that, you want to take things further – become a top scorer, play international football, make a move to a different country. I look back now after 19 years playing at the top, seeing three different countries, playing a lot of games, scoring a lot of goals, seeing a lot of success, but most of all enjoying it all. Yes, this is way more than I could ever have expected."

It is much more than we anticipated, too, Dennis. For Arsenal fans, especially, it has been a total privilege.

**Alan Smith**



**Simply the best**

**While Arsenal's men's team enjoyed a solid first season at Emirates Stadium, the Club's Ladies were taking their rivals in England and Europe by storm, winning a quartet of titles**

Arsenal Ladies have dominated domestic football for the past 15 years, but in 2006/2007 the team remained unbeaten to achieve a unique clean sweep of all four major trophies, including the highest honour in club football – the Women's Uefa Cup.

Since their formation in 1987, they have won 27 major honours – including nine League titles – making them the most successful team in the history of British women's football.

Then, in 2006/2007, they became the first side from outside Scandinavia or Germany to win the Uefa Cup, after defeating Umea, the Swedish two-times winners, 1-0 on aggregate after a gruelling two-leg final. Umea, ranked number one in the world, included the Swede Hanna Ljungberg (no relation to her compatriot, Freddie) and the Brazilian player Marta in their line-up – two of the greatest players in women's football today. But the 2003 and 2004 winners could not find their way past the resolute Gunners defence and, in particular, the inspired goalkeeping of Emma Byrne.

Alex Scott's long-range thunderbolt in the dying moments of the first leg, in Sweden, ultimately proved just enough for Arsenal to be crowned the champions of Europe after they held their nerve to secure a tense 0-0 draw in the home leg.

Arsène Wenger said: "I want to congratulate the Arsenal Ladies team. They have dominated football in England for years, and now they have done it in Europe – in a brave way, too. They had to really dig deep and suffer in that final, but we are all very proud of them."

Thierry Henry, the Club captain, described the Uefa Cup victory by Arsenal Ladies as a "fantastic achievement". He added: "Now they can say that they are the best team around: what an amazing feeling to walk around knowing that you are the best in Europe. They didn't lose a game in any competition: that is just ridiculous. Thank God for the Ladies team, because they brought some silverware to the Club [in the 2006/2007 season]."

The Uefa Cup success came in Arsenal's fifth European campaign; previously they had twice reached both the semi-finals and quarter-finals. The team, managed by Vic Akers, had topped their qualifying group with a 100 per cent record, then beaten Breidablik, of Iceland, home and away, before defeating Brondby, from Denmark, in the semi-final.

Victory in the Uefa Cup was the third part of the quadruple. The League title – Arsenal's sixth in the past seven seasons – had already been sealed with an astonishing 100 per cent record and in March they had defeated Leeds United 1-0 in the League Cup Final.

Just a week after winning the Uefa Cup, the Gunners added their fourth and final trophy, the FA Cup, following a 4-1 victory over Charlton Athletic. In front of a record crowd of more than 24,000 spectators at Nottingham Forest's City Ground – almost double the previous highest attendance for a Final – Arsenal initially fell behind to a goal by Charlton's Katie Holtham. However, they recovered to beat their London rivals thanks to two goals each from Jayne Ludlow and Kelly Smith. The victory was Arsenal's eighth FA Cup success – more than any other team – and maintained their 100 per cent record in FA Cup Finals.

Further success for Arsenal Ladies came when they won the Community Shield and London County Cup to complete an historic grand slam.

Akers said he was delighted by the triumph of winning all four major trophies, but was determined that the team would not lose their hunger for further success in the future. "I'm very proud: it's a fantastic achievement," he said. "At the start of each season we know what trophies are up for grabs, and are playing to win them, but winning them all never normally happens. Yet we had a feel about us this year from the off, even though we lost players [to injury]. Everyone slotted in and pulled their weight and we've done a great job."

It took only five years from the time of their formation by Akers in 1987 for the team to win their first piece of silverware – the 1992 League Cup – as they began to end the dominance of Doncaster Belles. In that same season, Arsenal romped away with the National League South title to win promotion to the Premier League for the first time.

They marked their first season in the top flight with a domestic Treble, and won a second Treble in 2001, while completing unbeaten League campaigns in both 2005/2006 and 2006/2007.

Arsenal Ladies were formed following a link-up between the Club's Community Sports Programme and the Aylesbury Ladies team. Stars of their early successes were Jo Churchman, Caroline McGloin and Naz Ball up front, while the Northern Ireland defender Gill Wylie was the team's captain.

The England players Kirsty Pealling, Sammy Britton and Marieanne Spacey came to prominence in the mid-Nineties, and propelled the team to further glory.

In 2001 Arsenal Ladies became the first English side to represent England in European competition, when they qualified for the Uefa Women's Cup. They turned semi-professional at the end of that season, and have gone from strength

to strength as they continue to receive sponsorship from players in the men's team.

Kelly Smith – the only English player ever to play professionally in America – returned to play for Arsenal in 2004; the England international was nominated for FIFA's World Player of the Year in 2005. Her team-mates Alex Scott, Katie Chapman, Anita Asante, Karen Carney, Lianne Sanderson, Mary Phillip and Rachel Yankey also play regularly for England, while defender Faye White is captain of both the Club and country.

Jayne Ludlow, of Wales, Scotland's Julie Fleeting, and the Republic of Ireland trio of Emma Byrne, Yvonne Tracy and Ciara Grant are also full internationals.

It all adds up to a highly impressive team line-up, one which has led Wenger to refer to Arsenal Ladies as "the Galacticos of the Ladies game". But unlike the Real Madrid version, they are now also the reigning champions of Europe.

4.

# Glory days return

George Graham's managerial career at Arsenal came to a premature end, but the 1971 Double-winner brought a pile of silverware to Highbury and left the Club in great shape

# **The dapper revolutionary**

**Patrick Barclay says George Graham is one of Arsenal's three greatest managers, with six trophies more than making up for a mistake that cost him his livelihood**

As a football man and an Arsenal icon, George Graham deserves better than to be remembered for a mistake that led to his suspension from the game. To advance the excuse that other hands were also in football's till at the time of his covert deal with the Norwegian agent Rune Hauge – there had been many irregular payments before, and there have been many since – would be futile. Yet it can pertinently be said that respectable men in many fields are prey to temptation, especially when it arises in an atmosphere of moral myopia.

It will not be forgotten, either, that Graham returned to the Club which, as a player, he had helped to the Double and not only restored the fierce pride of that Bertie Mee era, but sustained Arsenal's status as a leading power in the land in a way Mee's men had not been able to do. In that sense, Graham's contribution was more comparable to that of the unquestionably great Herbert Chapman than Mee's. Moreover – and here again the comparison with Chapman holds water – if one measure of a manager is the legacy he bestows on those who follow then, just as George Allison was assisted in his task of completing a trio of English championships after Chapman's death by the quality of the players he inherited, Graham passed on a truly exceptional defensive unit, one whose massive significance in a period of continued success Arsène Wenger would be among the first to assert. Plus Ian Wright, of course; Graham brought him to Highbury and Wright was to set a club goalscoring record it would take Thierry Henry to beat.

The Graham era was evolutionary and at times there could be comparisons with the early, steely years of Don Revie at Leeds United. There were some enthusiastic contributions to the storm of headline-making incidents that accompanied the initial stages of the game's return to popularity after the horrors of hooliganism that had culminated in 39 deaths at Heysel in 1985 and the shameful neglect of questions of safety and comfort that led to many more fatalities at Hillsborough in 1989. Even when they were at the height of their powers under Graham, Arsenal were in no mood to be left out of the soap opera. Quite apart from their occasional escapades off the field, they had a penchant for controversy on it that seemed to reflect the bristling competitiveness Graham had resolved to instil upon his return to the Club. Far from angels with dirty faces, these could be devils in spotless white shirts, for behind the smart image



they put forward – from the start Graham insisted they wore Club ties and jackets on match days – lay a readiness to sacrifice just about everything in pursuit of a result.

The sight of an Arsenal posse in pursuit of a referee was not uncommon and there were a couple of large-scale brawls. A few months after the first title had been secured, in 1989, Norwich City came to Highbury and lost 4-3, a Lee Dixon penalty in stoppage time prompting much argybargy in the North Bank goalmouth while the fans celebrated wildly behind. The FA's response – Norwich were fined £50,000 and Arsenal £20,000 – indicated whom the authorities deemed mainly responsible. But the tendency persisted and a year later Arsenal might have paid a heavy price for a further transgression; they were docked two points, and Manchester United one, following a brawl at Old Trafford in which every player on the pitch except David Seaman took some part. The teams were also fined £50,000 each by the FA, but the points deduction was the aspect that might have hurt and it had been a fear of that as well as a sense of responsibility that had prompted the Arsenal board to get in ahead of the FA by announcing that Graham and his players had been subjected to Club fines of two weeks' wages. In the 1988/1989 season, the loss of two points would have been more than enough to cost Arsenal the title; they would have gone to Anfield simply to make up the numbers at a party. But in 1990/1991 they were all but unstoppable and, although they did not actually wrest the leadership of the League from Liverpool until mid-January, the ultimate margin was stretched to seven points.

Away from the pitch, some of Graham's men displayed a relish for nightlife (sometimes even in the daytime) that rivalled anything seen in previous eras. Not just the spectacularly troubled Tony Adams, who spent two months in prison for drink-driving, and Paul Merson; on one occasion Ray Parlour found himself out of action injured as a result of an altercation in a nightclub at Butlin's in Bognor Regis. Presented with such contradictions to the air of dignity, Arsenal always like to exude, Graham would spread his arms in an unconvincing form of despair. While the team were winning, he had no appetite for dwelling on their human frailties.

Sometimes the notion is advanced of Graham the hungry fighter: a ruthless product of a tough environment. That is too simplistic, though the different sides to his personality are clearly evident from the contrast between how he behaved as a player and as a manager. It is well known that his background was far from privileged. He was born on November 30, 1944, in the village of Bargeddie, near Glasgow, whose character was then defined by its coalmines but which now tends to concentrate on housing commuters. His father, a steelworker, died when

he was three and his mother had to bring up six children alone, but the indications are that the family, though inevitably short of money, were happy. George followed football and in particular Airdrieonians (now known as Airdrie United) who, in his adolescence, reached the rare and giddy heights of fifth in the Scottish First Division. George himself was a talented footballer and signed for Aston Villa when he reached the age of 17 and could turn professional. He made eight appearances for Villa in what is now called the Premiership, playing as a striker and scoring two goals. He was still in his teens when he went to Chelsea, joining Tommy Docherty's highly promising squad, and quickly hit it off with Terry Venables, who was to be a considerable influence on his career as well as a perennial and close friend. Graham was very popular and, with his easy charm and dark, almost Latin, good looks, attracted plenty of girls. While never forgetting his roots, he was a sort of Jock the Lad, very much at home in the more fashionable reaches of the capital.

In 1966, the year England won the World Cup, he and Venables took divergent career paths. Both headed for North London, where Venables struggled to convince Tottenham Hotspur fans he was the new Danny Blanchflower while Graham, after much patience had been required on all sides, eventually shared in something special. He was not exactly the epitome of the Bertie Mee player. He wasn't even a George Graham player: many years later, in his Highbury office, he was to snort: "I would never have signed a player like I was." Nicknamed "Stroller" for his nonchalant air (though his pace was never searing), he was always more of a technician than an athlete and did not contribute conspicuously to the defensive aspects of a team.

At one stage of the Double campaign, indeed, he was dropped by Mee, but on his return he scored a dazzling goal against Liverpool, volleying home after a clever manoeuvre with Jon Sammels. It would now be called a one-two, but Graham has always liked to talk of the "wall pass", as if deferring to his youthful games in the streets of Bargeddie, where he polished the skills that were to make him Mee's concession to elegance in a superbly spirited, integrated and organised but essentially practical team. By now Graham was playing in midfield, just behind the front and to the left, where his lack of pace could be addressed by means of the craftiness that was not quite enough to obtain him credit for the equalising goal against Liverpool in the 1971 FA Cup Final – Eddie Kelly was judged to have got the vital touch – but earned him man-of-the-match honours.

Docherty, as Scotland manager, invited him to embark on an international career that was to extend to 12 matches. Later Docherty took him for a spell at Manchester United. He spent the rest of his playing days at Portsmouth and,

finally, Crystal Palace. He was 32. Venables, less than two years his senior, was the manager. An upwardly mobile one, too. In Graham's first season, Palace were promoted to the old Second Division. Towards the end of Graham's second season, the last of his playing career, he was asked by Venables if would like to coach the club's youngsters. Did Venables, even then, detect in his pal the gift for coaching that was to make Graham one of Britain's leading managers? Or was he doing his friend a favour? Or was it just a mad gamble? Many years on, Venables declared: "If you'd asked me to name the player, among all those I ever played with, who was least likely to make a coach or a manager, I'd have probably said George."

Soon after giving Graham responsibility for the Palace kids, Venables began to realise that he had not only a flair for the job but a surprising relish. The same Graham who, in his playing days, would laughingly implore more avid students of the game, such as his friend Frank McLintock, a fellow Scot and Arsenal captain, to "put the ball away" and have some fun, was now confessing to a love of trying to improve young players that could induce him frequently to work day and night. It may well have been that he accepted Venables's offer to have a go at coaching because he was not sure what sort of work to opt for – he had been toying with the idea of entering the pub business with McLintock – and there was a need to find something because footballers then, though well enough paid, did not enjoy the fabulous lifestyles of their counterparts today. It is tempting to theorise that a material insecurity born of the privations of Graham's youth guided him on to his new path. And to speculate that the changes in his attitudes to both football and life that followed his appointment to his first managerial post at Millwall also harked back to his background. The older Graham became, and the greater his need to vindicate his origins, the more driven and ruthless he appeared.

After continuing his youth work with Venables at Queens Park Rangers for a couple of years, the call came to fly solo on the other, less fashionable side of London, at Millwall. It was a splendid education in management, a tough schooling in what can prove an unforgiving trade. He arrived towards the end of 1982 and, at the end of his second full season, the club were promoted to the old Second Division; Graham had demonstrated an understanding of how to forge a team and in 1986 an approach from Arsenal showed it had not gone unnoticed. He was already a changed man. As soon as he went to Millwall, friends noticed how the carefree stroller was evolving into a steely, determined, almost obsessive manager. But his feelings for Arsenal remained strong and, when it was decided that his former coach Don Howe was not the answer to their management problems, the call came. Arsenal had drawn up a shortlist of four

candidates for the job and Graham, as a Highbury old boy, was the first invited to the London flat of the chairman, Peter Hill-Wood. Also there were the vice-chairman David Dein, and the astute managing director, Ken Friar. To say that Graham performed well at his interview would be the height of understatement. The Arsenal powers that be decided immediately that there was no need to see the other three contenders. Graham's enduring passion for the Club, his ideas, his ambition and the aura he exuded had left them in no doubt that he was the man for the job.

Graham assumed responsibility for the footballing fortunes of Arsenal in the close-season of 1986. When the players returned from their various summers – captain Kenny Sansom had been on World Cup duty with England in Mexico, cursing Diego Maradona, while others had enjoyed a holiday – they found a young boss who meant business. He demanded total dedication from the squad but, as the Observer football writer and Arsenal fan Amy Lawrence details in her brilliant book *Proud To Say That Name*, a leavening of the old humour marked his early managerial style: “During his first pep talk at the training ground at London Colney, George wasted no time in showing his intentions. Noticing that Charlie Nicholas and Graham Rix had pierced ears underneath their bouffant footballer haircuts, he quipped: "If you want to wear an earring it's compulsory to wear a dress. Wear it socially, no problem, but don't come to work in an earring." It was typical George, authoritative yet audacious. A flash of quick wit to make the point. He wasn't going to lay down the rules like an old fuddy-duddy, but he made it clear there was to be no messing.”

There was certainly a touch or two of Bertie Mee about Graham: the emphasis he put on discipline; the insistence on travelling in smart Club attire. A student of the Herbert Chapman era who had lived through the revival under Mee, he was taking what he judged to be the best of the past and applying his own treatment to it. This surfaced in exhortations such as “remember who you are, what you are and what you represent”, repeated like a mantra, but in an aggressive, quasi-military tone; the players used to repeat it on their nights out, when emboldened by booze, and laugh, but the notion of the Arsenal player's pride as something worth fighting for did gradually re-enter their culture – and that was what Graham had been after.

Time-honoured principles also applied to the coaching, most of which Graham did himself. Just as he must quietly have admired and learnt from the man-management of Mee, it soon became clear that the coaching methods and philosophies of Dave Sexton and Don Howe in his playing days had rubbed off on him, more than perhaps even he had realised at the time. Graham's main obsession was with the defence. In training he would keep it simple and

repetitive, drilling the back line over and over again in the routines that were to leave forwards throughout England and farther afield utterly frustrated as they were caught offside; up would go the arms of Adams and company, snuffing out yet another threat to Arsenal's goal. "Clean sheets" was another phrase that resonated around London Colney. The work was long and hard and, if it had not proved so efficacious, the players might have been tempted to protest. But before long a sense grew that wind was beginning to swell the sails of a long-becalmed club.

The first League match under Graham was at home to Manchester United and victory was secured by the only goal, from Charlie Nicholas, the fans' favourite. It was towards the sad conclusion of Ron Atkinson's reign at Old Trafford and soon Alex Ferguson was to come south to replace him, to join battle with Graham, but in those days Liverpool were the team to beat – and several months later, at Wembley in the final of the 1987 League Cup (then known as the Littlewoods Cup), Graham's Arsenal did beat them. Another Scot, Kenny Dalglish, was in charge of the Merseyside club, which had achieved the Double in the previous season but were now confounded as two goals from Nicholas outweighed one by Ian Rush. The Arsenal support had almost forgotten how to celebrate a trophy – this was only their second since 1971 – and their gratitude to Graham was boundless. They had witnessed the power of his teachings in the semi-final, a North London derby against a Tottenham Hotspur side managed by David Pleat and featuring Chris Waddle, Glenn Hoddle and Ossie Ardiles in a five-man midfield calculated to make the purists purr. That season Clive Allen, the lone striker, scored 49 goals in all competitions and it was he who gave Spurs a first-leg victory at Highbury. He also put Spurs ahead at White Hart Lane. Shortly afterwards, the watching nation began to appreciate the new grit of the men from Highbury as Viv Anderson and Niall Quinn retaliated, forcing a third match. It was also on Spurs' ground, where Allen struck yet again, but so did Ian Allinson and then, at the 11th hour, in a thrilling show of resilience, David Rocastle hit the winner. It even spawned a memorable fanzine, entitled *One-Nil Down, Two-One Up*. Graham had reached base camp in his quest to take the Club back to the summit of English football. He had established that Arsenal were never beaten until the last whistle sounded. The psychological pre-requisite for the historic moment of 1989 had been established. And the trophy brandished at Wembley was to be the first of a few.

Arsenal finished a creditable fourth in the league that season. In 1987/1988, they slipped to sixth and missed out on a trophy when Luton Town beat them 3-2 in the Littlewoods Cup Final, but Graham was reshaping the side. At first he had been restrained in the transfer market, just bringing in the speedy Perry Groves

from Colchester United for £50,000 as if signalling his wish to see wholehearted endeavour. Even more significantly, though, he spent upwards of 10 times as much on booking the services of Alan Smith, who was loaned back to Leicester City for the rest of the season, but arrived at Highbury for the beginning of the new campaign. What a signing he was to prove: Smith would be the leading goalscorer in two Championship seasons and also the conqueror of Parma in the Cup Winners' Cup Final. Graham had already given a mental thumbs-down to Nicholas, whom he eventually shipped out to Aberdeen in January 1988, and envisaged pairing Smith with Paul Merson. He was fortunate in that a lot of youthful promise was present at the Club when he arrived: above all Tony Adams, whose accession to the captaincy in place of the fading, disaffected Kenny Sansom was, of course, a key move, but also Merson, Rocastle and Michael Thomas. Around them he bedded in hungry players in their mid-twenties such as Smith, Steve Bould, Brian Marwood, full-backs Lee Dixon and Nigel Winterburn and Kevin Richardson, who had won the League with Everton. None required the breaking of Arsenal's wage structure and all were to give excellent value, to put it mildly. And now Arsenal were ready to challenge anyone.

From the start of the 1988/1989 season, there was a likely look about the side. John Lukic was at his steadiest in goal. Dixon and Winterburn, having taken over from the veteran England internationals Anderson and Sansom, lent briskness and urgency. Adams and Bould were solid in central defence. Rocastle and Marwood tirelessly flanked Thomas and Richardson. And up front Smith and Merson gelled. They did very well at home and, unusually, even better away, and were ahead of the pack at the beginning of April, when the real story of the season started to be written. According to a substantial proportion of the press, Graham was acting as author of his own misfortune when suddenly he switched to three at the back at Manchester United. He was criticised for being overly defensive in turning to the system, which employed Adams and Bould as markers with David O'Leary introduced as sweeper, and the outcry grew when, in the 85th minute of the match, Adams swung a leg and sliced the ball into his own-goal, costing Arsenal two points, although it is only fair to add that the young skipper had already notched a goal at the orthodox end. Graham argued that, for from reining back with the finishing line in sight, he had wanted to get his men used to the new system in time for what he thought would be the crucial match at Liverpool. He was to be tactically vindicated. And he was also right about the importance of the Anfield collision, although for tragic reasons it could not be played as scheduled on April 23; because of the Hillsborough disaster, it was postponed until May 26, by which time every other match of the season was

over.

Despite everything – or perhaps because they felt an obligation to try to give their people some respite from the grief – Liverpool had maintained top form and were unbeaten in 24 matches when Arsenal's coach began its journey north. It hardly needs stating that Graham's team needed to win by two goals to take the title on the number of goals scored. He had told them that, because no one outside Highbury expected them to do it, they were under no pressure. And for a while they believed him. But as the coach neared Merseyside the nerves began to jangle and so Graham had further work to do. After a break for a meal at a hotel, he gathered them and assured them they would win 3-0. But they had to be careful not to leave gaps at the back by chasing the game – if it was 0-0 at half-time, that would be fine. When they got to the dressing room, he used a familiar managerial motivational tool by ordering that an article in one of that day's newspapers, from former Liverpool star Graeme Souness, which scathingly compared every Arsenal player with his opposite number, be pinned to the wall. At the end of a cat-and-mouse first half in which Liverpool seemed to be content to play out the draw that would give them the title, it was 0-0 and Graham had, of course, prepared his players for that. Then the opening goal he had promised would be theirs came from Smith, with the faintest of glances of his head. Smith then found Michael Thomas in stoppage time and everything, it seemed, had been turned on its head, including Thomas himself. At the final whistle there was pandemonium – and amid it the Kop's generous applause for the new champions was unforgettable. But later, once back in London, as his euphoric players went clubbing, Graham headed for bed. And in the morning he flew to Scotland for a round of golf with his brother. He was keeping calm and already preparing for next season.

In normal times, this would have entailed adjusting his squad to meet the demands of the Champions League (or Champions' Cup, as it was then). But these were not normal times: English clubs had been banished from European competition since the riots at the 1985 final between Liverpool and Juventus at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels, leaving Graham and his team free to concentrate on domestic affairs.

Not surprisingly, given that Arsenal had become champions with a team most fans thought was still developing, Graham made few changes, but the season began badly with a 4-1 defeat at Manchester City and often betrayed signs of a hangover, although they finished fourth. Arsenal made little progress in either cup, so there was no warning of the dramatic improvement in League results in 1990/1991, when they took the title having scored 74 goals for the concession of a mere 18, representing one of the best ratios in the history of the

English game. The low goals-against total owed a good deal to the recruitment at the beginning of the season of David Seaman, the top-class goalkeeper Graham had always wanted. With Bould established alongside Adams, the back men were simply getting better and better as a unit. In midfield Paul Davis added extra skill to the mix, but the crucial change was that an outof-favour Marwood had been replaced by Anders Limpar. Once again Graham had come up with something different. Maybe opponents had got used to the early crosses with which Marwood had so enthusiastically served Smith; so in came Limpar, a Swede with bewilderingly fast feet and a gift for the stabbed through-pass to which Smith and Merson were only too glad to adjust.

The football was even more dazzling than in the first Championship season. And effective. Only Chelsea beat Arsenal in the League, though Manchester United enjoyed a 6-2 triumph at Highbury in the League Cup and the FA Cup run was ended by Spurs in a match remembered primarily for Paul Gascoigne's raging free kick.

Now Europe's biggest stage did beckon and Arsenal took to it in style, beating Austria Vienna 6-1, with Smith scoring four; a 1-0 second-leg loss mattered little. They then drew 1-1 with Benfica in Lisbon, but a bombardment at Highbury failed to finish the job and the Portuguese champions won 3-1. This time Graham had been unable to come up with the right tactics. He seemed to have delivered another masterstroke when he unveiled Ian Wright, but, despite the amazing strike rate of Smith's latest partner – he hit 24 goals in just 30 League matches – Arsenal could manage only fourth in the final season of the old First Division. Nor was there any joy in the domestic cups; Wrexham beat Arsenal 2-1 in the FA Cup third round to inflict on the Club one of their most ignominious defeats.

Although the next season, 1992/1993, was even worse in the League – Graham's team finishing 10th, and the lowest scorers in the Premiership with 40 goals – the haul of both the FA and League Cups enabled the support to hide their concerns under rousing renditions of a favourite song (Georgie Graham's magic/He wears a magic hat/And when he saw the FA (or Rumbelows) Cup/He said 'I'm having that'). But they could see that Limpar's form was in and out; that the likes of John Jensen and Ian Selley hardly sparkled in midfield; that signings like Pål Lydersen and the former Millwall winger Jimmy Carter would not measure up to the Club's highest standards. Graham's management had lost its sparkle.

Years later, he blamed himself for not spending more of the Club's money on players of the standard that were to come in subsequent eras. But there were other factors in Manchester United's eclipse of Arsenal. One was the change in



the application of the offside law, which suited Sir Alex Ferguson more than Graham. Another was that Graham became oddly sour. He had always been a disciplinarian and, in their hearts, the players never minded that, but in his last couple of years his bawling-outs sometimes verged on the brutal. Among those to suffer was Limpar, whose confidence drained away, but others also felt the message was becoming a little too blunt to have any real meaning. In short, his regime was acquiring a jaded air.

Still, he had two cups and the bigger of them got Arsenal back in Europe for what was to prove Graham's last stand, the magnificently defiant plotting of the Cup Winners' Cup campaign of 1993/1994. Even Smith, on the wrong side of 30 now and prey to the odd injury, was hearing the rough edge of the boss's tongue. The team scraped into fourth place in the League but did little in the domestic cups; it was as if everything had been channelled into the European journey that was to complete his collection of honours. After the Danes of Odense had been seen off, 3-2 on aggregate, Arsenal swept aside Standard Liege, of Belgium (3-0 at home and 7-0 away), then edged out Torino, of Italy, with Adams scoring the only goal over 180 minutes. Next was a semi-final against Paris St Germain, for whom David Ginola cancelled out Wright's opener at the Parc des Princes only for Kevin Campbell thrillingly to settle matters at Highbury. Right from his first season at the Club, Graham had set out to ensure his team could cope with technically more gifted opponents and the final against Parma was a chance to show he could still do it. Parma, backed then by the riches of the Parmalat dairy-products empire, had stars aplenty, including Gianfranco Zola and Tomas Brolin, the Swede who had knocked England out of the European Championship in 1992, and Colombia's Faustino Asprilla. But a team containing Selley and Steve Morrow beat them. Once more, Georgie Graham was magic as the red hordes danced through Copenhagen.

The origins of Graham's drawn-out downfall can be traced back to arguably his finest achievement: the second Championship, when only one of 38 matches was lost. Seaman and his protectors kept 24 clean sheets and everything was rounded off with a flourish when Anders Limpar completed a hat-trick in a 6-1 triumph over Coventry City at Highbury. In the months afterwards, Graham recruited Wright, who gladly joined the title-holders from Crystal Palace, amid much fuss. No one outside Scandinavia took much notice when he unveiled Lydersen, a burly defender from the Norwegian club Start, and few today could tell you much about Lydersen's Arsenal career, which featured little more than a dozen unremarkable appearances. But this signing was to prove significant in another way. Near the end of that year, the company of Rune Hauge, the agent who did the deal, sent Graham £140,000, which was put in a bank account.

When Arsenal officials later discovered this represented a cut of the £500,000 fee he had personally arranged with Hauge, they were dismayed by the size of the payment.

The second of the irregularities that brought down Graham involved another Scandinavian player, the stocky, curly-haired Jensen. An industrious midfielder known in Denmark as “Faxe” after his favourite beer (suffice it to say Jensen had no trouble fitting into the Highbury culture of the time), Jensen came to prominence during the Danes’ fairytale European Championship success in 1992. They had been invited at the last minute after the United Nations imposed sanctions on Yugoslavia. Jensen scored with a thunderous long-range drive in the final against Germany, leading the optimists among the Highbury support to expect similar fireworks; instead he became something of a cult figure, scoring only one goal in 98 League matches (for all the North Bank’s urgings), but being popular because he ran about a lot and, to be fair, could play a bit. Jensen was engaged towards the end of that memorable summer of 1992, but there was nothing romantic about the method. Arsenal paid roughly £1.6 million, of which about £900,000 went to the Danish club Brøndby. Hauge took the remaining £700,000 and within a month sent £285,000 of it to Graham, who again banked it (£35,000 went to Arsenal’s chief scout, Steve Burtenshaw). Graham’s total “bung” now stood at £425,000. His annual salary then was estimated at £300,000.

He was not alone among Premiership managers in playing this game, but he was to be the only one brought to justice and thrown out of football; sacked by Arsenal after a Premier League inquiry concluded that he had received the money “in direct consequence of” the purchase of Lydersen and Jensen. He was turned over to the Football Association and banned for, in effect, a year (Burtenshaw was fined £10,000 but remained at Arsenal until he left in 1996 alongside Graham’s successor, Bruce Rioch, who made him chief scout at Queens Park Rangers). Graham, after serving his suspension, was to return to the game at Leeds United, whose revival prompted Arsenal’s old rivals, Tottenham Hotspur, to bring him back to London. There, however, the chemistry was wrong and he soon settled instead into a new role as a television analyst for Sky Sports.

It goes almost without saying that Arsenal, in his absence, had moved on to even greater things under Arsène Wenger: three Championships and four FA Cups in the Frenchman’s first decade, not to mention appearances in the final stages of the Champions League and UEFA Cup. This might be offered as evidence to challenge the claim that Graham’s record, over nearly nine years, was the superior in Europe over a similar timespan. Graham brilliantly organised the Cup-Winners’ Cup campaign that culminated in the win over Parma in

Copenhagen in 1994, when the goal from the ever-modest but perennially heroic Smith defeated Zola and company. But once again a peak of Graham's career was to lead to the lowest trough, for fate was to send Arsenal back to the Danish capital six months later, to face Brøndby in a defence of the trophy.

Arsenal beat Brøndby with fewer problems than a 4-3 aggregate might suggest. What worried the directors, as they watched Smith and Wright pave the way for a 2-1 win in the first leg, was the recollection of what they had heard from their Danish counterparts over dinner in a Copenhagen restaurant the previous night. Although no mention of Graham is recalled – oddly, you may think, given that a book by journalist Henrik Madsen, published in Denmark but not England, had referred to Graham being cut in on the Jensen deal – the payment to Hauge did come up in conversation. It was probably a sore point to the Brøndby people, because the year before they had been asked to furnish football's international governing body, FIFA, with the details. The German club Hamburg had been alerted to the discrepancy between the fees Arsenal had paid and those Brøndby had received; since Hamburg – having previously sold Jensen back to his native land for about £300,000 – were due 25 per cent of any subsequent profit made on him, they naturally wanted the calculation done on the basis of the greater amount, while Brøndby just as predictably favoured the smaller. A high-powered FIFA tribunal headed by the then-president, João Havelange, ruled against Brøndby. So, in more senses than one, they had done bad business.

The Arsenal directors pondered all this with furrowed brows. Having enjoyed so many proud moments with Graham, they were naturally reluctant to confront the obvious question mark over his probity. Events were to conspire against Graham in the ensuing months, with the *Mail On Sunday* newspaper reporting that the Inland Revenue was investigating his receipt of £425,000 from Hauge's Guernsey-based company Interclub, while the Premier League's "bungs" inquiry was also closing in on the awful truth. An indication of the emotional mixture in the Highbury boardroom came when the chairman, Peter Hill-Wood, defiantly told Brian Woolnough of *The Sun* newspaper: "We will not sack George Graham and I hope he will not resign." Hill-Wood must have been aware that, under the terms of an Inland Revenue survey of all clubs commendably arranged by the then- Premier League chief executive, Rick Parry (later to join Liverpool), Graham had been selected by revenue officers for scrutiny of his accounts. It was, of course, an educated guess, and Hill- Wood could hardly have avoided the realisation that Graham had committed a crucial tactical mistake when, at the beginning of December, the manager decided to relieve himself of the £425,000. He gave it to Arsenal (adding £40,000 as

interest) rather than Hauge, thereby suggesting to all concerned, except himself, that the money was less an “unsolicited gift” from the agent, and, therefore, arguably exempt from tax, than remuneration for services rendered. Yet Hill-Wood gamely insisted in his pre-Christmas declaration to *The Sun*: “I have had a meeting with George and he assures me he has done nothing wrong.” It was, after all, the time of year for charity.

Thus Arsenal drifted on through the festive season, but the team were labouring in midtable. They won only one of their first six League matches of 1995 and were knocked out of the FA Cup in a Highbury replay by Millwall, a club from a division below. When the announcement of his sacking was made on February 21, there was a widespread view among supporters that, illicit payments or not, Graham had passed his leave-by date. The last team he picked, which drew 1-1 at home to Leicester City, is worth recalling because it illustrates their concerns. In goal was Seaman, while Dixon and Winterburn occupied their proper places at full-back. So far, so good. But we are now aware that Adams, who was partnered by Andy Linighan in central defence, had little more than a year to muddle through before owning up to alcoholism, thereby awarding himself an extension to his career which proved extremely beneficial to Arsenal in the Wenger era.

Jensen and Selley, a midfielder most noted for the promise he was never to fulfil, were flanked by Eddie McGoldrick, a respectable player whose reputation suffered at Highbury because he was asked to step out of his class, and the swift but flimsy Dutch left-winger Glenn Helder. Further forward were Merson, like Adams a very good player enslaved to addiction, and Chris Kiwomya, whom Graham had signed from Ipswich Town around the same time as Helder (from Vitesse Arnhem) and John Hartson (Luton Town). Hartson proved the nearest to Arsenal class, or at least the class to which Arsenal aspired, but even he failed to meet the standard demanded by a future regime after caretaker manager Stewart Houston had given way to Rioch and the former Bolton Wanderers manager had been replaced, in his turn, by Wenger.

Had all the months in which he privately lived with the fear of an expensive disgrace soured Graham and made him a less effective manager? Some of the more experienced inhabitants of the dressing room felt his decline was more than just another instance of familiarity jading a regime. The dictum comes in many forms but, in essence, it means that, after a number of years, a manager must either change some of the players or himself change club. Graham did try to refresh the squad, but he made such a mixed job of it that many close to the Club, in retrospect, have wondered if his heart was still in a once-obsessive quest. At any rate, he could not emulate his friend and rival Sir Alex Ferguson at

Manchester United by moving into a second decade (let alone a third). By 1995, Ferguson's United had more than taken over from Graham's Arsenal as the prime force in the English game; they were dominating it. True, United did not win the Premiership title in the season that saw Graham cast out – they came second to Blackburn Rovers – but they had won it in each of the previous two seasons and they won it in each of the two that followed. Such was Ferguson's gift for replenishing his squad that they might have been unquestioned top dogs for a few more years but for the Wenger revolution at Highbury. Whether Graham versus Ferguson became an unfair fight, in terms of the respective resources they were given, is a fair point. But in 1994/1995 their squads were so disparate in terms of depth of quality it seems amazing that they inhabited the same division, let alone that Arsenal could force a scoreless draw in the Highbury fixture between the clubs just a few weeks before Graham's departure. Later that season, though, Arsenal lost 3-0 at Old Trafford. David Beckham, Gary Neville and Paul Scholes were just a few of the starlets who could not regularly get into a team including the likes of Peter Schmeichel, Denis Irwin, Steve Bruce, Gary Pallister, Paul Ince, Mark Hughes and Eric Cantona.

It was a strange but telling coincidence. On the day the Premier League's damning verdict forced Graham out, in a proper courtroom only a few miles across London, Cantona was charged with common assault following his memorable kung-fu attack on a Crystal Palace fan who had taunted him as he walked off after being shown the red card at Selhurst Park. It was a turbulent time for football generally.

Graham was to dispute aspects of the obituaries of his Arsenal management, notably the accusation that he had not bought very well; he countered by saying that he had bought cheaply. It was true he had bought brilliantly at first. But his record had deteriorated and the fortunes of two of his parting shots, Kiwomya and Helder, tell their own story. The truth was that, for all the mistakes he made, most dramatically in doing business the Hauge way, he goes down in history as a worthy heir to the tradition of Matt Busby, Bill Shankly and Jock Stein, those all-time great football men from the old industrial region of West Central Scotland. He knows how the Arsenal fans feel about him, too. Once, reflecting on the heart-warming ovation he received upon his return to Highbury for Paul Merson's testimonial, he said: "When I'm gone and the Arsenal directors have gone, they [the people] will remember George Graham." He's right. There is still only one bust at Arsenal, that of Herbert Chapman. But maybe one day there will be two. Or three. Because there have been three great managers of Arsenal.

# **Graham takes charge**

**George Graham talks with his former striker Alan Smith about his days as both player and manager at Arsenal – and why the two periods were so different in character**

George Graham has another George to thank for his introduction to Arsenal Football Club, for first planting the seeds of what later became a full-blown love affair. George and Ada Matthews had invited Chelsea's new signing into their Stamford Hill home shortly after the lad had moved down from Aston Villa. The couple's daughter, Christine (who worked at Chelsea and would later become club secretary), had suggested the move as a more homely alternative to the player's initial digs, an impersonal hotel on Gloucester Road.

New to the capital, the young Scot quickly accepted the kind offer, not unreasonably assuming that Stamford Hill couldn't be too far away from Stamford Bridge. He soon found out the truth, though. His new lodgings were actually situated in north London, several miles away from SW6 and meant a marathon trek across town to attend training. Graham didn't mind. Such was the warm hospitality of George and Ada that he was happy to suffer the long journeys, hopping on bus and Tube every morning with his Chelsea team-mate Ron Harris, who lived in nearby Hackney.

Back in Stamford Hill, prime Arsenal territory, 'Gentleman' George would regale his young tenant with stories from the Club's eminent past, about the great sides that had played just down the road at Highbury. Owning an extensive collection of books on the subject, he would proudly show them off. How much notice the dapper 20-year-old took of all this is another matter, seeing as he was just starting to discover the delights of the Swinging Sixties, but subconsciously or not, that early taste of Arsenal stuck in his mind. Just like his former landlord, in fact, Graham would later amass a similar collection of books, covering every era of this famous institution. Every autobiography ever written by an Arsenal man, seemingly – from Cliff Bastin to Liam Brady, Herbert Chapman to David O'Leary – has found a fond place on the heaving bookshelves of Graham's Hampstead home.

The seed had been planted. Though he couldn't know it at the time, this connection with the Gunners would dominate Graham's career. Unfortunately, by the time he actually joined the Club as a player in 1966, George Matthews had passed away, denied the pleasure of ever seeing his surrogate son wearing red and white.

The move across town, away from Stamford Bridge, had been coming for a

while. Chelsea's manager, Tommy Docherty, had started breaking up a team that had gone very close to achieving something substantial. Disillusioned with the dismantling of an exciting outfit, Graham had two transfer requests turned down before his manager suddenly accepted a £50,000 bid from Arsenal that required Tommy Baldwin to go the other way. When the striker heard of Arsenal's interest, he didn't hesitate. Dave Sexton's presence at Highbury was more than enough.

"He'd been at Chelsea with me and was a massive influence," Graham says. "A magnificent coach and the major reason I joined Arsenal. I knew that I could improve under him." And so George went to see Bertie Mee, the physiotherapist turned manager, in his cramped little office just down the corridor from the fabled Marble Halls. Though negotiations didn't take long, once a contract had been signed the new man began to realise that life was rather different in this neck of the woods. The King's Road and Avenell Road didn't have much in common. "It was all about standards," my former boss recalls as we delve into the past in his plush living room. "There was an Arsenal way that I found very strange at first. At Chelsea it was different – more off the cuff and Tommy Docherty was more of a fun-loving manager. There was good coaching there, mind, but it was a bit more relaxed. I went to Arsenal and it was very, very professional. It must have taken me about 18 months to get into the Arsenal way of doing things. Behaviour had to be right on and off the pitch."

It was a lot more stressful, too, since Arsenal were going through a poor time on the pitch. With the team regularly failing to trouble the top end of the table, the success of the early 1950s seemed an awfully long time ago. Compared with the carefree attitude at Chelsea, where a vibrant group of young players had made it all fun and smiles, the mood in north London was more serious and pressurised.

"I did wonder if I'd done the right thing at first, but I've never been one for looking back in life. I never regretted leaving Chelsea." That's not altogether surprising when you consider what was to come. After Graham's first few years at the Club had been marked by a flirtation with success, comprising two losing League Cup Finals, a ground-breaking European Fairs Cup Final victory over Anderlecht laid the ground for the big one – the year that would banish the ghosts of the Club's famous past. In 1971, the League and FA Cup Double was heroically clinched by a tight group of players who had quickly developed a tremendous bond.

By the start of that decade, a clutch of hungry home-grown products – Ray Kennedy, Charlie George and Pat Rice among them – had graduated with honours to merge with some outstanding characters brought in from outside. It



created a team spirit second to none, one that didn't allow for any malingering passengers. Back then, the players tended to generate their own set of competitive standards that extended far beyond the 90 minutes on match days. Training, as a result, often resembled a battleground.

"We used to have some vicious five-a-sides on a Friday, especially in the gym. When the ball was against the wall and someone was screening it, someone else would just come in and whack them. Then it all went off. There'd be punches thrown half the time. It was incredible. When a Saturday came it was no different." Harnessing this aggression, organising skilfully from the top, Mee was responsible for setting the tone, and his influence on Graham cannot be overstated. Remember who you are, what you are and who you represent – it is an old Arsenal mantra familiar to Highbury employees across the generations and one keenly advanced by Mee. Graham carried this through to his own managerial career, always trying to make sure that his players understood the heavy responsibility that came with wearing the golden cannon on the Club blazer.

"Bertie was a great delegator and he had real vision. He knew where he wanted to take the Club. When I was a player I didn't really appreciate Bertie, but when I eventually got into management I could see what his strengths were." One of them, undoubtedly, was maintaining the status quo by keeping players in line when they threatened to stray. An indignant Graham witnessed this first hand one day when he flew into a rage at South Herts Golf Club, Arsenal's regular meeting place on matchdays for the pre-match meal. The midfielder had been furious to learn that his team-mate, Jon Sammels, who by this time had dropped out of the first team, was getting paid five pounds a week more. "I went beserk," chuckles Graham. "I said: 'I'm as good as him, I'm playing more games than him.' It might have only been five pounds, but it was the principal."

Graham had let fly with both barrels, promising never to kick a ball again for Arsenal if he didn't get the same money as Sammels. Reacting in typically authoritative style, Mee showed the kind of diplomacy that his player would later try to emulate as a manager himself. "Bertie was brilliant in the way he handled me. He said I was quite right to be annoyed and that I shouldn't be getting paid less, but that I would live to regret it if I carried out my threat of never playing for Arsenal again. He promised to take the matter up on Monday, but in the meantime he expected me to give my very best that afternoon."

It was an outstanding piece of manmanagement from a man who always understood where his strengths lay. "He knew coaching wasn't his strength, so he made sure he employed the best coaches. He'd be there every day in his little red tracksuit, standing on the sideline as Don [Howe] did his bit."

Shortly after Graham's arrival, Howe had become Mee's number two, in succession to Sexton who had left to take up the manager's job at Chelsea. Yet as one innovative coach departed, another stepped up. "Don was a great coach," one of his old pupil's confirms. "He got this tag of being defensive, but it wasn't like that. He had some tremendous ideas. Much more vocal than Dave, he could bully and cajole with the best of 'em."

With the coaching side sorted out and a good squad in place, the challenge was clear: to overhaul Leeds United, Arsenal's main rivals, and bring the Championship trophy home to Highbury. Leading the dressing room charge was the irrepressible Frank McLintock, a fellow Scot and close pal of Graham's as well as being an extraordinary captain. McLintock's Churchillian speeches, combining his powers of motivation and naked desire to succeed, inspired his teammates. "Frank was a fantastic leader so it was an ideal situation for Bertie and Don. As coaches, there are only so many times you can bollock people, but Frank often took it on himself to sort things out before it got to Don or Bertie. He would call team meetings himself. The team spirit was phenomenal."

Graham had initially been signed as a centreforward. That's how he had started out as an apprentice at Aston Villa and where, over two seasons at Chelsea, he finished as top scorer with a more than useful record of a goal every other game. That theme continued for a time at Highbury, with the Scot leading the scoring charts with 11 league goals in his first season, but it wasn't long before his languid skills, his passing and vision, found a more suitable home a little further back. Laughing at the memory, he recalls the first time it happened. McLintock, still a wing half at the time before his switch to centre-half, got injured before a trip to Sheffield Wednesday. "Bertie asked me to play in midfield. We went up there, won 5-2, and I scored two from midfield. The next week I was dropped because Frank was fit again!"

Once things settled down, though, George found a regular niche on the left side of central midfield. "It gave Arsenal and me a new lease of life. We went on to carve out a great combination with Bob McNab, Geordie Armstrong and me. It was a great little triangle. I'd say to Geordie: 'You just give it to me and then go.' I'd feed him all the time, then get in the box myself."

Graham's speciality was the wall pass – a sharp give-and-go on the edge of the penalty area that reaped quite a few goals for the boy from Bargeddie. In addition to that, his heading ability was a source of great pride. Later on as manager, he would regularly demonstrate this skill, particularly to me, his obedient centre-forward, having always regarded himself as something of an expert. "It's all in the neck muscles, Alan," he'd say, walking across the training pitch, his head bobbing back and forth like a demented chicken as his charges

looked on trying not to laugh.

During those sessions, he would freely admit that he had never been the quickest as a player – hence the nickname ‘Stroller’ – yet other attributes, he claimed with a wink and a grin, more than made up for the shortfall. During five-a-sides on a Friday, he did his best to demonstrate this, as the little flicks and tricks came to the fore. To his credit, though, our boss would never harp on about his playing days in the way that some managers do. Players don’t respect that; it tends to bore them senseless. The 1971 FA Cup Final, for instance, went largely unmentioned, even if it did represent Graham’s finest hour. His efforts against Liverpool under a sweltering sun were enough to earn him the much cherished Man of the Match trophy. Most things went right for Graham on that baking afternoon. "I started slow and finished slow! They all came down to my pace."

Despite the self-effacement, George points to the Charles Buchan Trophy, a beautiful silver keepsake featuring Wembley’s Twin Towers, with no little pride. The coveted prize resting in a glass cabinet at home means an awful lot as an enduring reminder of his Arsenal playing days, a period that carried on for just over a year after that memorable Cup Final before Manchester United offered a completely new start. Although Arsenal reached Wembley again the following year, this time losing 1-0 to Leeds courtesy of an Allan Clarke header, the core and spirit of the Double side began to break up. Much to Graham’s disappointment and amazement, his great friend McLintock was sold to Queens Park Rangers. With his form tailing off, the disenchanted Graham would soon be heading out the door as well.

"Arsenal always did things in style. I could see the writing was on the wall so it came as no surprise when Bertie called me into his office. He said that the Club had agreed a price for me with three different clubs. Typical Arsenal. They didn’t try to play one club off against another to get the price up. It wasn’t an auction. They just told the clubs the price and left it up to them. Bertie said he had booked a room for me at the White House Hotel in Regent’s Park so that I could meet the three managers. Can you believe that? All very civilised."

Representatives from Everton and West Ham United converged on the hotel, but it was the delegation from United that won the day. Tommy Docherty, Graham’s old boss at Chelsea and now in the Old Trafford hot seat, had taken the canny step of inviting Sir Matt Busby along. A legend in the game who hailed from a similar Lanarkshire village background to George, Busby’s presence was more than enough to clinch the deal.

And so it was that the first half of Graham’s Arsenal career came to an end. He would have to wait another 14 years before embarking on the second, a

trophy-laden stint that easily surpassed his efforts as a player.

Before discussing that, though, it is important to document the startling transformation in between – the metamorphosis that saw ‘Gorgeous George’, the life and soul of the party, the man about town who tired of football talk, and who would often urge McLintock to "put the ball away" in favour of a pint down the pub, turn into a deadly serious coach demanding hard work and discipline.

In this regard, the influence of Terry Venables, whom George had first met at Chelsea, cannot be underplayed. As ambitious, outgoing and slightly cocksure team-mates at Stamford Bridge, a common love of music had set the ball rolling. After that, the friendship developed into something that lasts to this very day. With a biting Cockney wit and razor-sharp mind, Venables stood out as a leader, someone prepared to go his own way. "He was always one step ahead. He used to walk around with his own portable typewriter in a little case because he used to write his own articles for newspapers and magazines. That was unheard of back then. He always questioned things. That’s why he didn’t get on great with the Doc at Chelsea. If Tommy told us to do something, Terry would want to know why. Even now when we have lunch he leaves you thinking at the end of it. He’s a thought provoker. Whether you agree or disagree with him, he’ll throw things at you that’ll make you think."

That was certainly the case for Graham in 1978 when Venables asked him to have a crack at coaching the kids at Crystal Palace. As the manager at Selhurst Park, Venables had signed his old friend from Portsmouth two years before but, when Graham broke his leg during a friendly in the United States, retirement beckoned. At the age of 33, his playing career was over as formative plans were hatched to enter the licensing trade with McLintock. That’s when Venables stepped in with his tempting offer.

"Terry just asked me to try it for a year. ‘If you don’t like it,’ he said, ‘go and run your pub.’ Anyway, I just took to it and within a few months I was loving it. Nobody was more surprised than me that I had this great enthusiasm." In one way, it was just like old times. Living in north London, Graham was forced to make the long journey across town every day to Palace’s training ground, just as he had all those years back as a youngster at Chelsea. "As is often the way, I lived the furthest away, but was usually there first in the morning. I’d train the kids morning and afternoon. When they were off in the afternoon I’d sometimes have a kip on one of the physio tables before taking the schoolboys at night. I absolutely loved it. Couldn’t get enough. There were times when I’d be standing on the side of a pitch on a Saturday morning, freezing and getting soaked, wondering what the hell I was doing there. Looking back now, though, I realise how much I enjoyed it. Of course, everyone was saying: ‘George a manager?’

George a coach? You must be joking. He was a lazy bugger as a player.' I could understand them saying that, but I changed when I became a coach."

When Venables moved to Queens Park Rangers, Graham headed the same way, continuing his role as youth team manager by tutoring an excellent crop of youngsters who would all go on to play for the first team in the future. "I was learning all the time. Terry and I would chat about buying and selling players, about spotting players. With the chairman, Jim Gregory, we'd talk about contracts ... all the little tricks to get players to sign them. It was all a great learning process."

One day Byron Thorne, whose father Alan was the owner of Millwall Football Club, asked to visit QPR to see how the club's youth set-up was organised. "I'd have a cup of tea with him before training, then he'd ask me a few questions afterwards," Graham recalls. "I never thought anything of it. Then a few months later he rang me up out of the blue and said: 'My father's looking for a new manager. Would you like to come for an interview?'"

Millwall were a hard-up outfit struggling at the wrong end of the old Third Division. "It just shows you how things can work out," Graham says. "I went for a couple of interviews at the London Hilton and got the job."

So began three-and-a-half years of hard slog, of traipsing up and down the motorways of Britain to try to find the players that could realise Thorne's ambitious dreams. Yet before diving blindly into the transfer market, Graham had asked his chairman for six weeks' grace in order to assess the situation – to decide what needed changing. "We got together and I told him we needed nine new players. He nearly fell off his chair. I reeled off six names who I thought we could get straight away for around £200,000 in total. We ended up getting all six." Those signings set Millwall on the way to avoiding relegation by one solitary point thanks to a 12-match unbeaten run at the end of the season. By this time, Graham had been beguiled by the job, devoting every waking hour to getting it right.

"It was like 10 years' experience crammed into three," says Graham. "It was a dockers' club. Hard as nails. What the supporters there want is effort, enthusiasm, commitment. As long as you give them that, then you'll win them over. We created a hard-working, physical, very strong team and the fans loved it. Mind you, I'd have hated to have been a failure there."

He wasn't. In 1985 Millwall gained promotion to the Second Division, but not even Graham could have guessed where that would lead. Certain figures in North London had been keeping an eye on this progress, to the extent that 12 months after that promotion Graham found himself in the elegant drawing room of Peter Hill-Wood's Chelsea town house, being interviewed by Arsenal's

chairman for the job of manager.

What a turnaround it had been. A highly prestigious post that had, at one time, seemed reserved for Terry Venables, a post subsequently linked with established names such as Alex Ferguson, Howard Kendall and Graham Taylor, was being offered to a former player who had been coaching QPR's youngsters only a few years before. After telling Graham about Arsenal's interest, Alan Thorne was resigned to the reaction it would prompt. Graham explained that he had enjoyed his time at the Den, that it had been a fantastic experience, but this was Arsenal – *The Arsenal*. How could he, of all people, turn down such an offer?

With Ken Friar, Arsenal's managing director, and vice-chairman David Dein also in attendance during that first meeting, Graham outlined his vision for the future, how he would return the Club to its rightful place at the top. After briefly retiring to another room to consider their verdict, Arsenal's powerbrokers reappeared with satisfied smiles, offering handshakes of welcome to their new manager.

As an ambitious young manager with tremendous faith in his own ability, Graham started his new job with relish. "I wasn't daunted; more quietly confident. I surprised myself actually," Graham says. He immediately saw problems that needed to be addressed, such as some cliques in the camp that could potentially be highly damaging. "You can't have factions. You must have a common goal. I got all the players together and told them what I believed in, made it plain that I worked very hard and if anyone worked less than me, they didn't have much of a future at the Club."

Just as he had done at Millwall, Graham laid down a six-week period to gauge his precise task, a spell that would also allow everyone else to prove exactly how much they wanted to be a part of this new era. "I told them I'd be looking at everyone, staff included. 'I'm ambitious,' I said. 'If you want to be successful, stay with me, but there's going to be some sweat involved.' In life, some people are more talented than others, but some people can make up for it with hard work and get near their potential. If you can do that, I told them, I wouldn't ask for any more because I will never ask people to do something they're not capable of."

As one of Graham's disciples, I can confirm that he hated seeing people waste their natural talent. His philosophy was simple. Once he had witnessed the very best you could achieve on the pitch, he would keep pushing hard every day to bring about a repeat. That didn't always make him easy to work with, but there was a very real sense that he was doing this for your own good as well as that of the team. "You might not always enjoy working for me," he once

memorably remarked in a team meeting. "But come the end of your careers, when you look back at our success together, you'll regard these as great times, something to be proud of."

And he was right. At the end of it all, you forget about the bad bits: the rollickings, the defeats, the cancelled days off. Medals on the table – that's what it's all about.

As for having favourites during those early days and being suspicious of established stars (an allegation which came to the fore when the axe was poised to fall), Graham flatly denies harbouring any agendas. To illustrate his point, he mentions Kenny Sansom, England's muchcapped left-back, who, he says, wasn't entirely happy about a rival being signed. "I knew Kenny from Crystal Palace – he was brilliant – but I knew about Nigel Winterburn as well – tough, aggressive, nasty, with a good left peg. Oh yeah, I liked him. I remember Kenny coming to see me and being very unhappy about Nigel arriving. I said: 'This is how it is, Kenny. This is the new generation coming through. You're in the team at the moment. Fight for your place. Make sure you stay there.' By then, I think everyone realised they were going to be treated the same."

Yet a new breed of players was arriving to challenge the old order – promising players with room for improvement who could be moulded to fit into a hard-working ethos. Players such as Winterburn, Lee Dixon, Steve Bould and myself. The old guard was disbanding. Tony Woodcock and Paul Mariner, for instance, were already on the verge of leaving when Graham arrived, while Viv Anderson lasted a season before accepting a lucrative offer from Manchester United. Sansom, meanwhile, stayed for a little longer until his new boss, displeased with a critical newspaper article by his captain, handed the armband to Tony Adams instead. After that, it was only a matter of time before Sansom left.

As for finding the fresh blood deemed necessary, Graham preferred to use a particular system to keep an eye on emerging talent. "Every Monday and Tuesday I'd read the local papers from all over the country – the *Sheffield Green Un*, the *Newcastle Pink*, the *Manchester Evening Post*, the *Birmingham Argus* – to see who was doing well. The local journalists always know what's going on – they have the ear of the manager – so I'd read the reports to get an idea. 'Oh look, Lee Dixon's won player of the year again at Stoke.' I'd send up my scouts. I knew Bouldy had had an operation on his back – he was very stiff, very upright – so I had to keep an eye on him when he got fit again to see if he could shake off the stiffness. I knew Nigel well from his early Wimbledon days.

"All these players were in my mind. I knew they'd be hungry if they came to Arsenal. I was brave – you are when you're a young manager." As for making

the final call himself on potential signings, Graham would stick to a tried and trusted system. "I would always go and watch players three times – once at home and twice away. Players are always brave at home, but you've got to see if they've got the same kind of desire away. Three times is enough. If you can't form an opinion after that, then don't go again because that means you're unsure. The more you see, the more confused you can get."

Graham, however, has always known his mind and that assurance extended to Arsenal's London Colney training ground where day after day, week after week, he would run through routines designed to oil the machine and foster a robust team spirit. As players, you can't always feel team spirit developing; not, that is, until something happens on the pitch to bring everyone together. Yet every good team must have this close camaraderie. However, as Graham confirms, there is no secret formula: "You get it on the training ground. Remember how hard we used to work? Two against four, winning the ball back, closing down – all that fosters a work ethic and team spirit. But you've got to do it day in, day out. There's no other way."

Thinking back, it used to drive the players crazy, so repetitive were some of the drills, but come a sticky moment on a Saturday, whether it was trying to claw back a deficit or helping out a team-mate in trouble, this invisible force invariably came to the team's aid. Never more so, perhaps, than on May 26, 1989 when Arsenal clinched the League title at Anfield in the most dramatic circumstances imaginable. Everyone knows the story. With the First Division season at an end elsewhere, we needed to beat Liverpool, our only remaining rivals for the prize, by two clear goals in order to take home the Championship trophy to Highbury for the first time since Graham and his team-mates had managed to do so 18 years earlier.

While that famous night has been documented from every conceivable angle, the one from inside the camp made for compelling viewing. Graham rose to the occasion in inspirational style; never before had he been quite so convincing in addressing the troops, never before had he sent out his team in such a positive frame of mind. After getting a couple of hours of sleep in our Liverpool hotel, we met downstairs at five o'clock for tea and toast. Once everyone had eaten, the doors were shut tight as the usual flip-chart came out to go through the tactics. First, though, the man in the blazer stood up to speak.

"You are just a couple of hours away from the match of your lives, and you are in the perfect position of having nothing to lose and everything to gain," Graham said. "If we don't win the title, we can still proudly walk away from Anfield saying what a great season we've had. It's the best season since we all got together and it's going to get even better."



As the bell sounded, he delivered his parting shot. "Just remember, whatever happens out there tonight I am proud of what you have achieved this season. Go out and play without fear because you've got nothing to lose." At that, our manager, the one nicknamed 'Gadaffi' behind his back because of his dictatorial style – the one who had been pushing us incredibly hard for the past nine months – shook every player's hand before they went out. At times like this it is difficult to sum up the atmosphere in a dressing room. It veers between an intense feeling of brotherhood and a determination to do well on behalf of your loved ones.

"People don't believe me when I say I thought we'd win 3-0," Graham says. "But that's when you step up to the plate as a manager. You've got to convince your players, put them in the right frame of mind. I got a lot of stick for playing five at the back; people saw it as negative, but I thought that would suit Lee and Nigel because they liked bombing on, and that way we could get tighter to John Barnes on the left and Ray Houghton on the other side, who liked to drop back and get the ball.

"Liverpool actually played into our hands. Normally they'd be dominant at Anfield, fly at you in the first 20 minutes to try to win the game, but I thought they were very cautious. They just didn't want to lose 2-0. That suited us and 0-0 at half-time was perfect. We just had to have a go ourselves in the first 20 minutes of the second half to get the first goal. Mind you, the second goal came a bit later than I would have liked! But no, it was Roy of the Rovers stuff. There'll never be another finish like that. It was way beyond my wildest dreams and it put the Club back at the level it belongs." If Graham hadn't achieved anything else in the following six years, that unforgettable night on Merseyside would have stood on its own as a fantastic legacy. As it was, another league title came along two years later, this time in rather more comfortable style with only one defeat, before cup competitions began to take centre stage.

And after Arsenal became the first Club to win the League Cup and FA Cup in the same year, in 1993, Graham achieved what he still regards as one of his finest achievements – winning the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1994. "I was really chuffed when we won that trophy because a lot of the teams in that competition that year were top, top class."

He is right there. Apart from Parma – our stylish opponents in the final – Real Madrid, Ajax, Torino and Paris St Germain all lined up at the start. On this occasion, however, in contrast to a sobering extra-time defeat to Benfica in the European Cup in 1991, Graham was much better prepared. "I thought we'd have to be a lot more patient after that, so I swapped to 4-5-1. That's why I admired the lads. We'd play 4-4-2 in the Premiership on Saturday and then switch to the other formation three days later."

George enjoyed all the tactical stuff. He loved 'pitting his wits' (a phrase he often used) against Europe's best coaches and trying to come out on top. It was a personal thing. At times, the players felt as if the competition was simply being used as a vehicle to further his own credentials as a tactical coach of the highest order. Whatever his motives, the mood definitely changed when European weeks came around. In the days leading up to these ties, we would meticulously run through the plan at London Colney, refining our system on the training ground before watching videos of our opponents in the canteen. Sometimes it didn't work. The youth team players who had been called over to act as guinea pigs might start giving us the runaround, causing the gaffer to vent his spleen. "If we play like this, we'll get torn apart!" he would spit, alarmed by our efforts. Sometimes it led to a slight change in formation; other times we ploughed on until things started to click.

The end result, of course, was a wonderful, wonderful night in Copenhagen when the likes of Gianfranco Zola, Faustino Asprilla, Tomas Brodin and several of Italy's 1994 World Cup squad failed to break down our amazing back four after my 19th-minute goal had given us something to defend. Without doubt, it was a huge tactical triumph for Graham, another feather in his cap. That night, his sixth trophy in eight years joined us on the short flight home to Stansted Airport. Posing for photographs with the cup in the arrivals lounge, Graham looked like the happiest man in the world. Yet only nine months later he would be asked to clear his office.

Leaving the manner of his exit aside, though, perhaps the biggest disappointment during his final few years in charge (certainly to many of his stalwarts) was the fact that Arsenal had turned into nothing more than a cup team, incapable of sustaining a challenge in the newly formed Premiership. That chant of '1-0 to the Arsenal' was all very well, but it wasn't doing much for our chances in the League, where Manchester United had begun to set all the standards. After winning two titles in three years, things began to drift.

"That's when I should have got the chequebook out," Graham ruefully reflects. "The conveyor belt had stopped supplying kids from the youth team. It goes in cycles and we'd had our fair share. But I still believed I could go out and get players on the cheap from the lower divisions. I should have actually been out buying before we started slipping. I was naive. I should have insisted on spending big. I blame myself. I should have tested the board."

A board, incidentally, that took the sensational step of sacking their manager in February 1995 for accepting unsolicited gifts from a Norwegian football agent. Following a Football Association hearing, Graham received a one-year worldwide ban from working in the game. The scandal shook the football world.

Not half as much, mind, as it shook Graham. Arsenal had been his life. As a player and manager for more than 15 years, he had been devoted to the cause. The Club was in his blood. There must, therefore, be grounds for deep regret, no matter the details of who was right and wrong.

"Yeah, there are lots of regrets, but it's water under the bridge now. It happened. It could have happened differently, that's the only thing I'll say, but it didn't. It was a very tough time and I have to thank my wife and family for getting me through it. But I never look back. I keep moving on all the time. I think that's the way to live. It's been a good life. I've had two good careers. I was a goodish player – not great, but good – and was lucky to play in some very good teams – the Chelsea one and an excellent Arsenal team with certain qualities that made it successful."

It was as a manager, though, as a leader of men, that he will be most fondly remembered by Arsenal fans. Much more than his efforts over six years as a player, it was the robust way he ousted the underachieving culture at Highbury by exuding hunger, drive and a fervent professionalism that didn't take long to reap silverware. The satisfaction this gave him bettered anything he achieved with boots on his feet. "When you're a player, there's two basic things you worry about – your own form and the team's. But when you're a manager, there's a million different things. You've got to have a good relationship with your chairman, a good relationship with your staff, not just on the coaching side, but with all the people at the Club behind the scenes. There's so much more pressure on you. You know if you lose two or three games there's no hiding place, whereas, as a player, if you have a few dodgy games and get dropped there's a good chance you'll get back in the side again."

It is easy to forget that the Club hadn't won the League Championship for 18 years until Graham delivered the big prize in 1989. That set the scene and the tone and helped provide the infrastructure for what followed a few years down the line under Arsène Wenger.

"As a manager, you always want to give your fans hope of winning the top honours. That's the only thing you can say. You can't promise you'll definitely win things, but what you can say is that you'll be up there fighting until the end. People always ask what my proudest achievements in football are and I'd say it's giving Arsenal fans memories. It doesn't matter how old you are, to have memories up there is wonderful." He points to his head, where most of the past happily lives in vivid technicolour.

One chapter, of course, takes on a much darker hue. The inglorious way in which his time at Arsenal ended can never be erased. He must think about that moment every day of his life.

Yet despite all the controversy and rancour surrounding his dismissal, a pure love survives for a Club that provided so many happy times over the course of 15 years. As we walk into his study the photographs, trophies and assorted mementos provide overwhelming proof, if any were needed, that Arsenal Football Club remains very much in the forefront of his mind. Next to the autobiographies and assorted books weighing down the bookshelves, stands every match programme of his time in charge, neatly bound into volumes, eight and a half seasons in all.

"The Club do that for every manager," he says, his words unmistakably tinged with pride and affection. A much older match programme lies in there too – the precious pamphlet that records Arsenal's first competitive match at Highbury, a 2-1 victory in 1913 over Leicester Fosse. "I didn't really take an interest in the Club's history until I became manager," he says. "That's when I started reading books when we travelled away."

George Matthews, it is clear, has a lot to answer for. And when it comes to George Graham, most of it is good.

## INTERVIEW

# **Captain courageous**

**Tony Adams was a player straight out of Boy's Own: brave, committed and hewn out of that peculiar form of granite from which all great centre-halves are made**

Tony Adams could always tell that he was a natural leader. It goes right back to the days as a confident kid dishing out instructions in the playground, taking sole charge in the middle of the pack in the comfortable manner of those born to the role. It doesn't suit everyone. To some, the responsibilities of leadership are a troublesome burden, an unwanted nuisance to be avoided like the plague. Then there are people like Adams – captains to the core who embrace their duties without a second's thought. For an early example, we can go back to Hunters Hall Junior School in Dagenham, where a gangly blond-haired boy would organise matches between all his mates. And that didn't just involve picking two sides. Even back then, special tactics came into play to try to gain the upper hand.

"I remember putting Geoff Fricker in goal, Marty Cook at centre-half and I went up front." Adams recites the names without pausing, as if it all happened yesterday. "It was us three against about 10 others most of the time. Geoff was goalie because he was a great gymnast so was good at diving. Marty was quite big for his age so stayed at the back while I would just float about up front. It was brilliant! We always won."

Winning: now there's an equally appropriate theme to accompany the topic of leadership when it comes to addressing the life and times of this inspirational character. For someone born in 1966, the finest of years for English football, it was maybe destined that winning would develop into an extremely pleasant habit, one that Adams never had cause to give up during a spectacular career spent serving one club. Four Championships, three FA Cups, two League Cups and a European Cup Winners' Cup – a collection of trophies spread over three decades that turned this ambitious individual into the most successful captain in Arsenal's history. Not that everything ran smoothly for this serial winner. On the contrary, Adams has had to endure some extraordinary lows, mostly off the pitch where his losing battle with alcohol led to all sorts of misdeeds, including eight weeks in prison for a drink-driving offence. It was six days before Christmas, 1990, when Arsenal's captain was led down from the dock at Southend Crown Court, numb from the shock of the judge's sentence. If only he could have turned back the clock to three years before, when he had accepted the captain's armband, dreaming of glory.

Even now, the prospect seems extraordinary – to entrust a 21-year-old with such huge responsibility at a club where so much is expected from every single player, never mind the captain, who must lead from the front and set an example. In fact, many of his team-mates were thinking along the same lines when our man emerged smiling one morning from a meeting with his manager, George Graham. Those gathered outside wondered in all honesty if this happy-go-lucky character could handle the ‘grown-up’ demands that accompanied the job. Adams, meanwhile, in typically ebullient fashion, didn’t think twice about accepting the honour. After all, he’d captained every one of his teams up until then, why not the first team? It was a natural progression. "It felt pretty natural," he says. "I felt like I was doing it anyway. I was surprised, to be honest, that he [Graham] hadn’t given it to me six months earlier."

Reading this in plain black and white, it sounds rather arrogant, but face to face that’s not how it comes across. No offence is intended to Kenny Sansom, the previous skipper, whom Adams always held in the highest regard. As two London lads who loved a good laugh, this pair had plenty in common. On this matter at least, there was never any chance of them falling out. The younger one, in fact, walked straight across that day to see his senior team-mate, just to make sure no hard feelings existed. They didn’t. Kenny had been punished for a newspaper article in which he criticised the boss. It was just one of those things. Sansom wished his successor all the luck in the world. In any case, if the move hadn’t happened then, it would have fairly soon. Graham, you sensed, wanted a different sort of lieutenant out on the pitch; someone he could rely on as a mouthpiece, as an aggressive deputy, to relay his demanding orders with unquestioning zeal. Adams was his man, the obvious candidate, whose clear inexperience was counterbalanced by outstanding promise and unwavering conviction, traits that thread their way through the player’s whole life.

To gain a firm grasp of a mindset slightly different from the crowd, we need to consider Adams’s childhood. Disinterested in schoolwork, his thoughts never strayed far from the beautiful game. "Even then I’d lay out, say, cups against pencils like teams on the floor," he remembers. "I had a proper league. I’d use the orange caps from my dad’s propane gas tanks. They came second one season to the matchbox cars. The pencils were always quite good ... I think it was in me, organising other people. I noticed, as well, that as I got on in football, this helped me and people liked it about me so I kept doing it."

This extrovert nature was inherited from his father, Alex, a decent centre-half himself who managed one appearance for West Ham’s reserves before going on to play for the Army during National Service. An asphalter by trade, Alex also turned his hand to lorry driving and roofing – all unforgiving jobs where, in a



verbal sense, you had to give as good as you got in order to survive. "I always remember him as a big, strong man. He wasn't shy, I suppose." Neither was his lad. A few years on from messing about with cups and pencils, the schoolboy felt so sure of himself that he'd instinctively take charge during youth-team matches, telling full-time apprentices exactly what to do. "Oi you, come here!" the 15-year-old would bark, pushing and pulling in a way the North Bank would later take to its heart.

Not surprisingly, though, this brash behaviour upset a few people. Some of those perched one rung above on the football ladder didn't take kindly to this cocky young upstart bossing them about. Adams's overtly vocal style also raised a few eyebrows in an environment where anything slightly different from the norm gets mercilessly mocked. For Adams, some England schoolboy trials particularly stand out. "I remember one lad who would take the mickey out of me horribly," he says. "I used to shout 'TA's up!' when I climbed to head the ball and he'd always mimic that. It was strange. One part of me inside was a really insecure little boy who didn't want anyone making fun of me and the other side was saying, 'Well, actually, you're winning everything in the air, everyone's saying you're a great player, so carry on as you are'."

He did exactly that, so successfully that he got a chance in Arsenal's first team at the age of 17, walking out to face Sunderland as the second youngest debutant in the Club's history. The match, in all honesty, could have gone better. It took only two minutes for the nervous number five to gift the opposition a goal by dwelling on the ball for too long, allowing Colin West to dispossess him and chip the goalkeeper, Pat Jennings, from 20 yards out. "I was incredibly nervous beforehand and went out with my shorts on the wrong way round. But I just loved the buzz of it all and it gave me a taste for more. What really hurt was getting dropped for the West Ham game a few weeks later. Don Howe [coach at the time but soon to become manager] said I wasn't ready. I was disgusted." Again, team-mates didn't know what to make of the swaggering rookie. "I think they found me very cocky at first," Adams smiles.

Adams had graduated from a reserve side featuring the likes of Danny O'Shea and Colin Hill. "They had been showing me the ropes. Good honest pros, not flash prima donnas like some of the guys around the first team at that time. On the pitch I was a very confident young man who just wanted to improve, to get in the first team and win things. No one and nothing was going to stand in my way. In the reserves, I think we lost at Southampton in the opening game of one season then went on a run of 24 games unbeaten to win the Football Combination. I was enormously proud, but immediately thought: 'OK, what's next?' The captaincy was part of that responsibility. My attitude was

always 'Who else could be captain?'. I had to have it. The senior lads would take the mick out of me, but nothing was going to get in my way and I think I had the talent to back it up. I must have seemed terrible to them because I didn't suffer fools and I didn't like to lose."

A good example of this professional intolerance cropped up one night after a 3-2 defeat at Oxford United in the League Cup. After coming on as a substitute, Adams wasn't hugely impressed by the part Pat Jennings had played in two of the goals. Afterwards, the youngster made his feelings known in pretty strong terms, not discouraged at all by Jennings's status in the game as one of the most naturally gifted goalkeepers of his or any other generation. Being the type that he was, Adams didn't feel the need to make any allowances. All he saw was an ageing keeper who, at 39, he thought was undoubtedly past his best and, as a result, not doing the team any favours. "Looking back on it, you'd say 'How dare the kid'," he admits.

If this spiky attitude caused something of a stir, his habit of referring to people as "John" or "son" also had the potential to land him in hot water. He didn't mean anything by it: no disrespect was intended. The terms were only a reflection of Tony's East London roots, but inevitably not everyone saw it that way. After going ice skating one day, the 16-year-old headed for home via the Tube. "Ticket to Dagenham East please John," he chirped to the man in the booth at Lancaster Gate. "He turned round and snapped, 'My name's bloody well not John!'. I thought for a second that I was in the footballing world and he kinda called my bluff. I thought: 'Oh my God! Help!' "

Adams is the type of person who remembers these things: moments in his life when he took a step back, when something happened to disturb the steady uphill climb. Adams always highlights three major setbacks in particular as important reference points. At the age of 13, Adams had made it into the last 30 for a place in the England Under-15 schoolboys' squad. In order to whittle the number down to the final 22, a trial was arranged at Lilleshall National Sports Centre in Shropshire. Consequently, the eight London boys selected for the trial travelled up the day before by train. Along with Adams, the group included Michael Thomas (a future Arsenal team-mate), Dennis Wise, John Moncur and Steve Potts, who would all go on to enjoy professional careers.

Yet come the trial match, Adams sensed something was wrong. Organisers who had acted in such a friendly manner towards him on previous occasions were now behaving in a strange, stand-offish way. Adams was handed a number 13 shirt and told, together with five other London boys, to stand behind the goal. They had all been discarded without getting a chance. It turned out that an education officer had been on the same train from Euston and had reported the

boys for misbehaving. Some coffee had been thrown during high-spirited jinks that didn't actually involve Adams. Seething with frustration at the injustice of it all, Adams took great satisfaction when his London representative team later beat the full England schoolboys side at Goodison Park. Though revenge tasted sweet, it couldn't make up for the fact that he had missed the showpiece games against West Germany and Scotland at Wembley. "Right," he thought, "I'm going to do it my way from now on." His determination to make the big time doubled in intensity.

For precisely this reason, the second disappointment also hit terribly hard. Having made his first team debut in November 1983, he struggled to break through on a permanent basis during the two seasons that followed, to the point where Martin Keown, his contemporary and rival at centre-half, stood ahead of him in the queue. When Tony broke a bone in his foot, his mood only worsened. "I was sat in the reserves thinking, 'Jesus, am I ever going to play again?'. I was hurting so deeply inside that I just wanted to kill the world. There was jealousy, resentment. You just want to prove people wrong. Looking back, though, I think I needed that rejection and that competition with Martin. Without it, I don't think I would have got as far."

Such extreme feelings surfaced once more after the third in a set of career-defining setbacks. It was the summer of 1988 and England's young central defender had been twisted and turned, embarrassed and humiliated, by the incomparable Marco van Basten during the European Championship in Germany. Such were his mercurial powers, Holland's deadly striker would have destroyed anyone that day: it was just Adams's bad luck to get caught in the firing line. But the whole country, it seemed, was pointing the finger at Adams. Landing back at Luton Airport after England's early exit, he was forced to take evasive action. "There were about three coachloads of fans who all wanted my head. They were chasing me. I had to run to my car and get out of there quick."

That summer our captain privately vowed to go around all the grounds the following season and prove his detractors wrong with a string of gutsy displays. And wouldn't you know it, he stayed true to his promise. At the end of May, he was lifting the Championship trophy at Anfield after the most dramatic climax to a League season in history. A very proud manager made sure afterwards that he mentioned the feat. "He has suffered a lot of stick, which has been very undignified and done little for football," George Graham said as the champagne corks popped. "But he has proved his strength and character, and we all did that tonight."

Redemption for Adams had turned up in abundance. Not for the first time, or the last, he had answered his critics. Ten years after Adams's nightmare time

with England, a remarkably similar situation befell David Beckham during the World Cup Finals in France after he was sent off for kicking out at Argentina's Diego Simeone. Luckily for Beckham, Adams was on hand in St Etienne that night to offer sound advice based on hard experience. "I told David that the only thing he could do was to go out and play well for Manchester United the next season," Adams says. "It happened to me in 1988. I felt the whole world was blaming me. It was one of three things in my life that reinvigorated my enthusiasm and drove me on to prove everyone wrong."

As part of the package, Adams started issuing a loud rallying cry in the dressing room before matches, the sort of aggressive mantra he would later hear Terry Butcher, a mentor during England get-togethers, take to another level. To those hearing it for the first time, Butcher yelling phrases like "Raw meat!" and "Caged lions!" came as a surprise; it even sounded faintly comical, yet these motivational methods actually had an effect, not just for the bawler but for those standing within earshot. Adams had already made up his mind to go down this road after being present in the dressing room for one particular England Under-21 game. "I didn't play that day, but you could hear a pin drop. It was deathly quiet. It didn't seem to me that the players were motivated, getting up for the fight. As it happens, they went out and lost. After that game I made a point of getting people going in dressing rooms. I thought it worked. When I sobered up I started questioning why I was doing some of this stuff. Was it just for show? In the end I kept the good stuff and let go of the rest. Some of it was just feeding my ego, serving no purpose. I started doing it in a more professional and humble way. I didn't have to scream at someone – I'd done too much of that."

In any case, the atmosphere by this stage had changed as the Arsène Wenger era had begun. Forceful tub-thumping and blood-curdling cries didn't play such a central part in the urbane Frenchman's idea of suitable pre-match behaviour. "As my career evolved, I realised that you could be motivated and quiet at the same time. Some people can play like that. Sometimes [under Wenger] we've had calm dressing rooms, but we've just gone out there and torn teams apart because we had individuals with the talent, with the self-determination. When that's the case, we didn't need to scream and shout. Highly motivated individuals got the job done."

Yet on this particular point, on metamorphosing from mad ranter to cool rationalist, it seems that Adams isn't alone in undergoing a change. He claims that Wenger hasn't always been the calculating professor who prefers a quiet dressing room to wild histrionics. "When he was at Monaco, he was the teacupthrowing, blood-pumping, swearing type who used to go mental at his players. When he went to Grampus Eight he completely changed. The Japanese

way influenced him."

Having confronted his demons as a recovering alcoholic, Adams was a different person entirely upon Wenger's arrival, much more introspective than the old version. In many respects, then, the timing was ideal for this merging of minds. Adams agrees. "The teacher will appear when the pupil's ready." And you wouldn't have caught him saying something like that 15 years previously. The pair dovetailed perfectly. The new Tony Adams was ready to embrace fresh ideas and, as luck would have it, Wenger had a stack of them up his sleeve. "He's a great physiologist. He really does know about the human body, about the preparation needed to go and play football."

Yet it's the concept of change that hangs heavily in the air whenever Adams discusses this period in his life. Everything was different. His troubled marriage to Jane had run its sad course. As part of the catharsis, Adams was exploring new avenues in double-quick time. He had gone back to investigate the benefits of education; he was learning to play the piano, and he had started reading voraciously as well as taking a keen interest in the arts.

For him, then, the Wenger years will forever be associated with eye-opening liberation, with a broadening of horizons, as much as two Doublewinning campaigns that topped off an amazing career. "I don't want to sound big-headed, but it felt so easy. I didn't break sweat half the time after years of struggling away. Physically, I was in great shape. I wasn't abusing my body. I was eating well, sleeping well, with no stress outside the game. My self-esteem was returning and I wanted to work with people who had self-respect. It was just a great time. You can't live outside of football. It's a reflection of who you are when you step on to a football pitch. I was free and certainly wasn't going to take orders any more. I wanted to work with people whom I respected and enjoyed working for."

If that sounds like a criticism of George Graham, or even of Bruce Rioch, it shouldn't be interpreted that way. It's more a question of horses for courses, of a new temperament suiting a new style. "Under George [Graham] there was a lot of structure, organisation and rigidity. A lot of it was fantastic, but I did feel like I was playing under orders. Our relationship was more father and son than anything. Sometimes I was a naughty son and he'd turn a blind eye because I was doing a good job on the pitch."

And what about Rioch, another strict disciplinarian? "I've apologised to Bruce because I just wasn't there for him. I spent most of my time down the pub. I went in for a cartilage operation then went on an endless bender. Bruce couldn't find me, didn't know where I was. That's not a good start when your captain's disappeared."

Yet none of this has dulled his love for the game. Adams still buzzes with excitement when recalling his early years as an ambitious schoolboy travelling across London every Monday and Thursday evening to take part in Highbury training sessions led by the dexterous Terry Burton. To this day, Burton remains, in the eyes of Adams, one of the brightest, most innovative coaches with whom he has ever worked. "It was always small groups. Two v two all the time," Adams says, getting increasingly animated as he describes a scene in the Clock End gym where they trained on the old, red cinder surface. "You couldn't wash that stuff off. I'd go to school on Fridays with red feet. In one biology lesson, I had to take off my shoes and socks for an experiment. Everyone was looking. I was really embarrassed."

Not surprisingly, memories from 22 years at the Club are long and varied. Like most of the team at the time, Anfield 1989 probably tops the lot. "God, who's ever going to repeat something like that? Unbelievable. I still think I got a nick on the ball for that first goal!" he says. However, one particular aspect always will generate an awful lot of pride: the construction, fortitude and incredible longevity of the original Back Four. Being home-grown, he was the founder member who watched on with interest as Graham carefully selected the various parts needed to create something dependable. Yet even Graham got more than he originally bargained for as this relentless rearguard went on to surpass everyone's expectations. Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn – the defenders' names are secure in Highbury folklore.

Searching for superlatives, Adams cites the European Cup Winners' Cup win in 1994 as the moment when this quartet and goalkeeper reached their absolute zenith. "Everything came together. Dave [Seaman] was an incredible goalie, the best in the world at that stage. Bouldy was spot on. Lee and Nigel were tremendous. No disrespect to the lads around at the time, but it didn't matter who was playing in front of us. We were so in tune with each other that we didn't need any protection." Mind you, the new manager took some persuading when he first arrived. Having taken a quick glance at their birth certificates, Wenger was convinced that Messrs Bould, Dixon and Winterburn, all in their 30s by that time, didn't have very long left before being put out to grass. "They showed the boss that experience can go a hell of a long way," Adams says proudly.

Among the defining moments of Adams's time at the Club, there can be few more resonant than his thumping volley against Everton in 1998 which gloriously wrapped up the League part of the Double. The symmetry was perfect: a neat through-ball from his great mate Stevie Bould, the unsung accomplice for so many years, which got clinically buried with a swish of the left boot. For a second or more, time seemed to stand still at a sun-drenched

Highbury as the goalscorer surveyed the scene with an expression of pure contentment. "That sums it all up!" the commentator, Martin Tyler, screamed. It certainly did. The French revolution, by this stage, was well under way, but "Mr Arsenal" had hung around to add an Anglo-Saxon touch.

"That was just a spiritual moment," he remembers. "Football was in perspective. I was doing my best at work, then going home, walking the dogs; basically being able to relax by switching off from football. It was just a lovely period in my life."

As for success on the pitch, it couldn't have gone much better. A second Double followed four years later, at which point this battle-weary defender decided to call it a day, having given his all to the Club for 22 years. "On reflection, I couldn't have asked for a better place to play my football," he says. "There were a couple of occasions when I wondered if the grass was greener on the other side. But at no point did it seem right to make a move. I was a London lad at a London club. We were winning things. I was at the top of my trade. I didn't need to go anywhere else."

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW



# **No doubting Thomas**

Alan Smith talks to Michael Thomas, former team-mate and scorer of one of the most famous goals in the history of the League Championship, the title-clincher at Anfield in 1989

Empty plastic cups leaking champagne littered the dressing room floor. The joyous sing-songs had all but died down, the television cameras recently departed as the first wave of euphoria threatened to pass. It was about 11pm on May 26, 1989, a good 45 minutes after something extraordinary had occurred out on the Anfield pitch. The most dramatic denouement in English football history had astounded every single person at Liverpool that night, not to mention the TV millions watching worldwide. Michael Thomas's last-gasp goal had prised the League title from Liverpool's grasp in what seemed like a sketch from a corny comic-strip. Yet the improbable script – victory over the reigning champions by two clear goals on their own patch in the final game of the season – had somehow unfolded like a film in glorious Technicolor.

Back in the away-team dressing room, taking a breather before jumping in the big bath, a few of the lads sat back for a second. Looking at each other, we came to the same, undeniable conclusion: whatever happened in the future, and we were a relatively young crop of players, nothing could surpass this incredible night. That much was clear. If we played until we were 50, it wouldn't get any better than this.

I suppose that stone-cold certainty applied to Michael Thomas more than anyone else. How could he ever top this moment – scoring the most famous goal in Arsenal's rich history? The most famous one, actually, in the entire annals of English football. That was the truth of it. By the age of 21, Mickey had scaled the summit.

Despite his winning another Championship medal with Arsenal two years later, despite signing for Liverpool (of all clubs) and going on to score a spectacular effort for them in the 1992 FA Cup Final, nothing could compare. One moment, and one moment only, was always destined to dominate the CV of Michael Thomas.

It was appropriate, then, that he should return to Liverpool and Anfield for a little reminiscing, together with Arsenal's other goalscorer that night, yours truly.

**Alan Smith** So Mickey, what do you remember about the lead up to that game?

**Michael Thomas** The one thing that stands out is the fun and games we had in training. George [Graham] wouldn't normally let us mess about; it was

usually quite rigid and serious, but that week it was five-a-sides all the way. I think he was trying to keep us relaxed.

**Smith** Do you think he thought we could win it?

**Thomas** He knew that we didn't fear anyone, so I think he believed we could win it, and we thought that as well. To be fair, we should have had it wrapped up before then. We made it really hard for ourselves with our last two games at Highbury, losing to Derby County and drawing with Wimbledon.

**Smith** Do you remember that lap of honour we did after the Wimbledon game? It was like: 'Good try lads, better luck next time'. The crowd almost felt sorry for us.

**Thomas** That was one of the eeriest atmospheres ever. The disappointment after that game was incredible. It didn't feel right doing a lap of honour with one more game to go. At the time, we didn't know the situation. We didn't know what we had to do at Anfield.

**Smith** Can you remember where you were when Liverpool played West Ham in the match that decided how many goals we needed to score? I was at the Football Writers' Dinner and as the goals kept going in at Anfield one of the journalists on our table kept doing the maths.

**Thomas** I was at home. When Liverpool ended up winning 5-1, I'm thinking: 'How many goals does that mean we've got to score?' It didn't look good. But when we came into training the next morning everyone was saying: 'Two goals. By two clear goals.' It wasn't as bad as we thought.

**Smith** One thing I remember about that week is us sitting outside on those benches at London Colney on the Monday. Bob Wilson came up and said: 'Cheer up lads, this is the week we're going to win the League'. We all looked at each other as if to say 'Yeah, nice one Bob'. Then there was that article by Graeme Souness in one of the papers. 'Men Against Boys' the headline was, or something like that. We pinned it up on the noticeboard and took it with us up to Liverpool.

**Thomas** Yeah, it was lambs to the slaughter, wasn't it? But it wasn't just Souness. Everyone seemed to be writing us off. We were just laughing about it on the coach. There was such a relaxed atmosphere. Merse, Grovesy, Nigel – playing cards as usual.

**Smith** I'll never forget the hotel in Liverpool we stayed at – the Atlantic Tower in the city centre.

**Thomas** That's right. It's opposite the Crowne Plaza. Still there now.

**Smith** I was sharing with David O'Leary and in the afternoon we slept like babies. What about you?

**Thomas** I was with Rocky [David Rocastle]. We had a great kip as well. I

think everyone did. Then, when we came down for our pre-match meal, George had his flipchart out as usual. People talk about managers now and how thorough they are, but there was no one like George for getting the details right. I've never known another manager who can change a game after only 10 minutes. He'd be up in the stand and if he wasn't happy he'd come down and sort it out straight away.

**Smith** Once we got to the ground, were you nervous in the dressing room?

**Thomas** The only time I ever used to get nervous was when I walked out of the tunnel. It was the same at Anfield. It was a special atmosphere in that dressing room, though, because everyone had travelled up on the coach – the whole squad, all the staff. That was really unusual so you knew this was different.

**Smith** The lads who weren't involved were given tickets behind the goal. I've got a photo of my goal at home and you can see Davo [Paul Davis] and Gus [Caesar] celebrating in the crowd in their blazers and ties. But what about the game itself? The main thing I remember about you, Mickey, apart from your goal, is how much energy you seemed to have. You didn't stop running all night.

**Thomas** I don't think anyone did. We went at them right from kick-off. There was no fear. We didn't care that it was Liverpool. We were desperate to be the first Arsenal team to bring home the Championship since '71.

**Smith** We didn't create many chances in the first half. I think the only one, actually, was when you chipped a ball in from the right to the far post. Bouldy headed it goalwards but Steve Nicol got his head in the way. Mind you, I don't remember any panic at half-time because we hadn't scored.

**Thomas** No, George said just keep playing the way you are. You'll get something out of this game, you'll get something. I remember being really relaxed at half-time.

**Smith** So when I scored after the break, what did you think when all the Liverpool players surrounded the ref? Did you know what they were complaining about because I didn't.

**Thomas** No, I'm thinking, 'Why are you going across to the linesman? Smudger's touched it. What's wrong?' When you saw all the Liverpool players crowd around the referee and linesman you're thinking: 'Nah, he's going to disallow this. We've got no chance.' Even today, the old Liverpool players say you didn't get a touch!

**Smith** I don't know why. I made good, solid contact with the ball. It's just that it didn't change direction much. I helped it on its way. And then, of course, you had that chance to make it two, when you toe-poked it straight to [Bruce] Grobbelaar.

**Thomas** Yeah, people always ask why I didn't take my time more, but I thought I was getting closed down from both sides. I didn't think I had time to take it on. The thing is, I always knew I'd get another chance. I just had this feeling. I knew another chance would come.

**Smith** So what do you remember about the goal? You must have described it a thousand times by now, but tell me what you remember about the most famous goal in Arsenal's history. A great touch from me, of course, to set you up!

**Thomas** Yeah, a great touch from you, but a crap one by me. I knew Steve Nicol was the last man so I tried to dink it over his head and run round the other side. But I didn't get it right and the ball hit him and rebounded into my path. That's when you know your luck's in. So when I'm faced with Bruce, I'm just waiting for him to make a decision, to commit himself and go down. 'Wait for Bruce, wait for Bruce', I'm thinking. Only when he made his decision was I going to make mine.

**Smith** What if he hadn't moved?

**Thomas** I'd have probably hit it with my left foot.

**Smith** Well, that could have ended up anywhere.

**Thomas** Steady on old son! I scored a few with my left you know...

**Smith** Yeah, I know you did Mickey. But I didn't think you were ever going to shoot. I must have been about 20 yards behind and I could see the whole picture unfolding, with Ray Houghton closing fast, about to get in his tackle. I'm going: 'Shoot, Mickey, shoot! Now! Before it's too late.'

**Thomas** Every time I see that goal – and I get goose pimples even now – I think Ray Houghton's going to get there. That's how close he was. I didn't realise at the time. It's frightening to see.

**Smith** The final whistle couldn't come quickly enough after that. I remember you dragging a ball out of the sky deep inside our own box and passing it back to Lukey [John Lukic]. Talk about cool. Shortly after that, the ref blew his whistle and all hell broke loose.

**Thomas** What a feeling it was to see those supporters in the corner and to see someone like Paddy O'Leary crying – all those years he'd waited for the Championship. It was unbelievable, being on the pitch with all your mates who'd worked so hard to get where we were, you can't beat that. I always remember seeing Rixy [Graham Rix] as well – he'd come across from France where he was playing. Rixy had looked after us young ones when we were coming through. We were indebted to him for that. Then you've got the gaffer hugging people. It was like... 'What's going on?'. We'd never seen that before.

**Smith** And the Liverpool fans were brilliant, weren't they, clapping us on the lap of honour. Even the stewards were saying well done. I didn't want to come

off. But when we eventually did, the dressing room was jumping.

**Thomas** It was bedlam in there. Do you remember Bruce coming in with the champagne? He gave us their crate, saying we deserved it, that we were the better team. I didn't know the man at the time, but for him to do that was fantastic. Then the party began.

**Smith** Going back on the coach, what a journey that was, with supporters hanging out of cars, beeping their horns, waving, going mad, all the way to London.

**Thomas** I tell you what the funniest thing was – seeing George come down the back of the coach to have a drink with the lads. That was unheard of. Then the coach drops us off at that club called 'Winners' in Southgate. Don't know how long we stayed there.

**Smith** It was a snooker club, I think. Some Greek lads owned it. They'd laid on some food and a lot of the lads were giving away their Arsenal blazers and ties. They regretted it the next day. Do you remember what you did on that day, on the Saturday?

**Thomas** I was moving house, from south London to north London.

**Smith** Bloody hell, what a time to do it! Then it was the open-top bus ride on the Sunday. A lot of us were feeling a bit rough that morning if I remember rightly. I think Rodders [Tony Adams] had come straight from a club and arrived at Highbury at about six in the morning. He'd lost all track of time and dozed off on the steps until they opened up the ground. The bus ride to the Town Hall was incredible, wasn't it? I'd never seen so many people. By the way, who gave you that baseball cap with 'MICKEY DID IT' written across the front?

**Thomas** To be honest, I don't know who gave me that. Some punter, I think. Still got it at home.

**Smith** Me and Rocky joined up with England shortly after that. Terry Butcher came up straight away to say well done. He'd watched the game in his room at the England hotel. Said he'd nearly come through the ceiling when your goal went in. He was desperate for us to win – fed up of the title always going north. Anyway, tell us about the rest of your time at Arsenal, Mick. It didn't carry on the way you would have wanted it to, did it? You had a few run-ins with the boss...

**Thomas** Well, there was a problem over money. I wanted more than George would give me. But it wasn't only that. I just wanted to get away. Although I still loved the Club, I wasn't enjoying the football. It had got to the stage where all we were doing was closing down, closing down. I just felt the ball was going over my head all the time. Having said that, George taught me a lot. I will always be indebted to him. But I was a hothead back then and I'd had enough.

**Smith** Don't suppose the FA Cup semi-final against Spurs helped much, did it? I remember that meeting beforehand when the gaffer decided to give you a man-marking job on Gazza.

**Thomas** That was one of his worst decisions ever. We were better than that. We should have just played our own game. I ended up following Gazza all over the place. He just started taking the piss in the end, wandering everywhere. By that stage, though, Dave Hillier had started playing instead of me. The writing was on the wall. At the end of that season, when we'd won the League again, I walked around the pitch on the lap of honour knowing I'd never do that again. Me and Rocky had been in our suits because we hadn't been involved, but George made us put tracksuits on. We didn't want to and neither of us was happy because we weren't getting picked. I was still arguing over my contract and I knew it was all coming to an end.

**Smith** You had a real battle with the gaffer, didn't you? I'll never forget that time in training when George was trying to get you to do press-ups how he wanted, trying to get you to go all the way down. The lads couldn't believe it when he climbed on your back and you refused to budge. He just couldn't shift you. I remember thinking then this was only going to finish one way. Were you upset to leave the club you joined as a boy?

**Thomas** I was upset to leave you guys, but not upset, in football terms, to leave George. Not at all. Joining Liverpool was a dream come true. You used to hear about the five-a-sides they did every day. When I first arrived I couldn't believe how hard it was. 'Pass, move, pass, move!' It was really intense. I realised why they were so sharp and so good at passing.

**Smith** Were the Liverpool fans alright with you after what you'd done at Anfield? Did they accept you OK?

**Thomas** At first it was hard with some of them but they did accept me eventually. Mind you, the Evertonians accepted me even better!

**Smith** I know you've got a great deal of affection for Liverpool. A bit like Arsenal, they're the type of club that stays with you once you've played for them, aren't they?

**Thomas** Yes they are. Living up here, I come to most of their home games. The old players have a lounge where they can meet up for a drink on matchdays. Saying all that, Arsenal will always be in my blood. That's where I started, where I learned my football. When I was playing for Liverpool, I always came back to watch you lads when you reached a cup final or whatever – the two cup finals in '93, the Cup Winners' Cup in '94. Arsenal will always be my family even though I love Liverpool as well.

**Smith** You've seen George plenty of times since, have you?

**Thomas** Yeah, funnily enough I get on better with him now than I ever did as a player. But I still have a chuckle when I look back to what he used to put us through, how hard he made us work.

**Smith** But was it all worth it?

**Thomas** Well, we made history, didn't we? That game at Anfield was special. And people say to me: 'Ah, it was all down to your goal.' I never take credit for that. We were a team and that was the great thing – everyone got on. Unbelievable, wasn't it, to win the Championship like that? It'll never happen again. People still stop me to talk about it. Everyone knows where they were. It was like a JFK moment. Nobody will ever forget.

**Alan Smith**



## INTERVIEW

# **The fans' favourite son**

**Ian Wright was more than just an Arsenal player: he came to epitomise what the Club represents and his evident love of the game and attitude endeared him to fans everywhere**

Ian Wright did not just *arrive* at Arsenal Football Club. He exploded into exuberant life. He burst on to the Highbury scene like an over-shaken bottle of fizzy drink: bubbling, effervescent and dangerous. He might go anywhere. Into the penalty area, into the arms of the fans in the North Bank, into enemy territory (mouth and boots blazing), or into regular dousings of hot water. From the moment he was signed, on September 23, 1991, life at Highbury was rarely confused with a monastery.

Yet Arsenal supporters weren't sure they wanted him to begin with. When George Graham signed the 28-year-old Crystal Palace striker, demolishing the carefully preserved Arsenal transfer record to get him, there were considerable doubts amongst the fans. The former labourer for Greenwich Borough Council came late to football and was not renowned for his sophistication. With a team already blessed up front with Alan Smith, Kevin Campbell and Anders Limpar, what would they want with this former plasterer? Swiftly, though, they found out. He scored on his debut, hit a hat-trick in his second game (at Southampton), and scored in his first game at Highbury against Chelsea. That would do. The flashing grin, the rampant raids, the flying boots, the raging ego, the goal celebrations, the enthusiasm, the anger, the aggression, the post-match opening of the dressing room window to address the fans below in the street and often treat them to Dennis Bergkamp's stolen shirt – Wright became Arsenal's most beloved dervish.

In his seven years at Highbury, he won one League Championship (1998), one FA Cup (1993), one League Cup (1993) and his four goals helped propel the team to the Cup Winners' Cup in 1994. Yet who would have thought such a thing when, small and physically flimsy, he was turned down by virtually every club in London. All those rejections over all those years built up a boiling eagerness to succeed. At Highbury, late but not too late, he found the natural home for his atomic glee and obstreperousness.

## **I first knew I was going to be a footballer**

"After I'd played a game against Kingstonian on a Friday in pre-season for Crystal Palace in 1985. We beat them 1-0 and I scored the goal. Steve Coppell,

the Palace manager, was watching, and he told me afterwards to report to play against Coventry City. That was when I realised this must be the change in my luck at last. It was a first-team game, in the old First Division.

"But I didn't go berserk because all of a sudden I was in among the professional ranks playing the game properly. I was ready to get, maybe, paid for it. When I turned up for the game the next day, the manager signed me on a three-month contract. My first football contract ever. Before that, I was just moving around from job to job. The last one I was doing was plastering and brickwork. I was married. I had a young family, Sean and Bradley, just born. I really needed the money. That's why it was hard to accept Palace's trial at first, because I thought: 'They're just going to mess me around,' like all the other clubs had.

"I'd tried everything. I went to Brighton at 19 for a trial and it didn't work out. Apart from Arsenal, West Ham, Charlton and Tottenham Hotspur, I went to all the other London clubs. I sent letters to every single London club. I had trials for Brentford, Orient, Millwall. I went to a lot of trials. I remember going to Wanstead for a trial at Orient, and I thought I played pretty well, but I heard nothing again. But I wasn't then like I was later. I was quiet. I think once I got accepted by Palace my character really came out. In those days I was really quite introverted and scared. Just trying to impress them and not saying much. It was really quite frightening. That's why when triallists came to Arsenal, I used to try to make them feel a little more welcome. You don't forget your own experiences.

"I saw the other side of life first. That's why my persona changed. I thought: 'Now I've got my chance, I'm going to try to do the very best I can.' It had been too hard to get there. I don't know why I didn't give up. When I was 21 and the Palace thing came up, I remember thinking: 'I really can't afford to mess around with football any more'. I needed to concentrate on making a living. I think I went with that attitude and just played like I normally played, instead of being nervous. That might be what went right. To be honest, I wasn't a very good plasterer either.

"Once I realised I was a footballer, it was amazing. I couldn't believe it. I still can't."

## **My first sight of Highbury**

"It was quite daunting when I played for Palace. I'd never seen it before, obviously, but I'd heard about the Marble Halls. And the Arsenal team were Champions then and they really battered us. I remember them so well. Tony

Adams, David Rocastle, Michael Thomas, Lee Dixon, Steve Bould, Merse [Paul Merson], [Alan] Smith, [Kevin] Campbell: they were so big and strong and powerful. I just found them – the whole thing – was like I didn't belong there. It was like, just come, get a beating and leave. And that's normally what happened. The only time that Palace ever won at Highbury was when I was playing for Arsenal. I scored my 100th goal in that game, but Palace beat us 2-1."

## **First impressions as an Arsenal player**

"Worrying! When I first got there, as Arsenal's most expensive signing, they did a vox pop in the street. 'What do you think of your new multimillion signing?' And they said, 'What did we buy him for? We don't need him. We got Campbell, we got Limpar, we got Merson, we got Smith.' So I watched that on the television and I thought: 'Jeez, I'm going to Arsenal now. I've got to try and get in the team.' I could have stayed at Palace, I was doing well. But I thought, if Arsenal want me, they must have seen something in me.

"It happened so quickly. I didn't even know it was on. My agent mentioned something on the Tuesday. By the Thursday I was at Arsenal. It was really weird. I never said I wanted to leave. Steve Coppell just said he'd accepted a bid from Arsenal. He said I had to report to Arsenal for the medical. He must have thought I was mad when I said: 'Oh no, when do I have to be there because I've got to go and buy my mother a television'. It didn't really sink in at all.

"But I did go and have the medical. It took ages. It was a nightmare. Because I was messing around with the doctor, still taking it for a joke. Every time, he touched me, I jumped like there was something wrong with me. 'Ouch. Oh, that hurts'. All that. I didn't realise how important it was. It was a joke, but he didn't take it as a joke. So it took about an extra three hours.

"I still didn't really believe it even when I was at my agent's house having my picture taken in that horrible old away strip in his garden. It was his fault. I wanted my picture taken in the classic red-and-white, but he didn't have a home shirt so my first picture in an Arsenal shirt was that ugly yellow one which I wore for my first game, away at Leicester City in the League Cup. You know what? It must have been an omen. I think it was all a haze for the first two months. But looking back now, I am so pleased to have a part in Arsenal's history."

## **First goal for Arsenal**

"I scored on my debut. The Leicester fans had been singing: 'What a waste of money' and when I scored the goal I got my own back by conducting them. I remember the goal. Paul Davies set me up. I sort of slipped near the edge of the penalty area and then whipped a shot right across the goalkeeper and into the top corner. He couldn't save it. That relaxed me.

"Then I scored a hat-trick on my League debut, away at Southampton, I scored against Chelsea and I scored in the return leg at home against Leicester. It was just too-good-to-be-true stuff [six goals in four games from September 25 to October 8, 1991]. It didn't really sink in for two, three months because it was everything you wanted it to be. It was like going to Disneyland. I was playing with these great players and scoring goals. It was just so simple at the time. It felt so easy. It was just my time. Somewhere along the line, with all the cosmic stuff that goes on, I just had to spend seven years at Arsenal in my life. My time had come. It's really weird. The year I went to Arsenal, between them and Crystal Palace I must have scored 36 goals and because it was the year before the Premiership, that doesn't show in Premiership records."

## **First Highbury goal**

"It was a simple tap-in against Chelsea. Alan Smith headed and I just got something on it. He was quite annoyed with me for touching it, but I was on such a roll. I'd already scored that hat-trick against Southampton. I still couldn't believe it. That match at the Dell had been amazing. I was playing with my best friend, somebody I grew up with on the same estate, David Rocastle. It was the perfect day for us. It was my Arsenal League debut with Rocky, I scored a hat-trick and David scored the other one.

"I remember that he opened the scoring. I slammed in the second one and then I beat the goalie from a tight angle after Anders Limpar had played me in. Arsenal fans would have begun to get used to my goal celebrations. I can't remember them all. But that one I just jumped up on the metal fence facing the fans and was shouting as loud as I could, 'I love you all'. It was brilliant. I went mad when I scored the hat-trick and all the lads piled on top of me.

"The next game after Chelsea was Leicester again, a replay in the Rumblelows Cup [as the League Cup was known at the time]. I scored in that one, too."

## **First rapport with the Highbury fans**

"Sometimes when you go to a new club and play your first home game, the fans haven't seen you yet. They don't know what to expect. But when I played my first game at Highbury I'd already scored four goals. So everybody was already so excited and couldn't wait to see me. They're normally very nice anyway, but to have scored four goals in two games, it was just even better. I was almost a hero already.

"It helped that the manager liked me, too. I remember that when I scored that hat-trick down at Southampton George Graham said to me: 'That is the most impressive debut an Arsenal player has ever made.' He said that to me in the corridor outside the dressing room, just as we were about to leave. He said it was 'unforgettable'. No one could take that away."

## **First number**

"It wasn't what you think. For my debut game at Leicester, Alan Smith pulled out at the last minute because of an ankle injury. And that was the one-and-only time I wore the number nine shirt for Arsenal. On the Saturday, Alan was fit, Paul Davis got dropped and I had the number eight shirt instead. After that I wore the number eight shirt forever. Smudge was a great partner.

"I never did find out why George Graham came in for me in the first place, but he always talked about the desire and the hunger. That's what he liked. I was just a direct goalscorer. I think he thought he needed that. Somebody who could get 20 goals a season without a doubt. When you look at it, he'd won the Championship before in 1991 by spreading goals around and when I came, everything was channelled through me."

## **First dressing room joke**

"I just used to throw stuff out to the fans, especially after big games. I used to throw my shirts out through the windows and have a laugh. Because the dressing room windows used to look down on the entrance in Avenell Road outside the ground, I'd just open the window and interact with them all. Then they put bars on the windows so you couldn't do it any more – I think that was my fault. But I used to love getting the fans involved. Because the fans are so close to you – and yet they're not really close to you, are they? So opening the window to throw out shirts and boots was a way of involving them. Sometimes I'd just talk to them. I just used to do stuff, like throw out Dennis Bergkamp's boots or something. I

used to ask the fans: 'Do you want Dennis's shirt?' and they'd go 'Ye-ahhh!' and I'd throw his shirt out.

"Dennis was fine about it. He was just born to play football in every way. He can do the banter, he can do the serious, he's perfect. It was a privilege to play with him. But I still cut up his underpants. And socks. All sorts of stuff. We used to share a room together, me and Dennis. I was the messy one, he was the tidy one. I mean, Dennis used to wear pyjamas to bed. So he was very much the gentleman, phoning his Mrs and getting ready to sleep. Whereas I was a sleep-talker and sleep-shouter. But when Marc Overmars came, I thought it was only right that the two Dutchmen share a room together instead. I think Dennis was definitely pleased when I suggested he share with Marc.

"But at the beginning, when Dennis first came in 1995 and we played together, I thought it was good that we were room-mates. He needed to be aware of the fact that he was so great that opposition players would want to rough him up, hammer him, bully him. We used to talk a lot about stuff like that. I told him: 'Dennis you're going to have to start giving it as good as you get, otherwise they're just going to chew you up, mate.' Even when we played against Hartlepool, defenders were kicking him and blasting him. I remember one of the headlines in the newspaper was that even against a reserve goalkeeper he couldn't score. The next game was Southampton. He scored. Twice. I was pleased. He knew that the time we had together was good for toughening him up. You had to stand up for yourself.

"I wasn't afraid of anybody on the pitch. I would give as good as I got. Sometimes, through over-exuberance, I went over the top, but I never finished a [another player's] career. That is something I'm so pleased about. I don't think I'd feel the same happiness and fulfilment about how my life as a footballer went if I'd finished someone's career with a tackle."

## **First disciplinary issue**

"It was against Oldham Athletic. I'd been in a collision on the pitch with Earl Barrett, the Oldham defender, and the Oldham fans didn't like it. They wanted me sent off. Obviously the referee didn't see it like that. Oldham were winning, and I scored the equaliser which made them even more annoyed. They were booing and as I was walking off, someone spat in my face. I responded. A policeman grabbed me. It was all a ruckus. I got into trouble for it. That was the first one. My first fine as well. It didn't happen everywhere I went. A lot of rival fans appreciated me. I'd play Chelsea and they'd give me stick. Yet after the



game I'd clap them and they'd clap me. Everybody was fine. But you go to some of the smaller clubs, they give you stick, you clap them, they're still giving you stick. They were very small-minded.

"I don't regret anything in relation to the discipline thing. It hasn't changed people's opinion of me. People don't come up and talk to me about my disciplinary problems or anger management classes. I think it was inevitable. I was an exuberant character. When we went through a phase when fans could report you to the police, I was being reported nearly every other week. I did become a target. It was hard for my family to go through because of the things being said about me. I hadn't really done anything. I know to get booed by away supporters is a compliment in a way, but it was hard. It was my natural game, tackling defenders and they want you booked, sent off. "The last thing I will say in my defence is that I only got sent off four times in my career, and three of those were in my last year when I'd left Highbury. That should tell you something."

## **First trophy**

"In 1993 we won the League Cup and the FA Cup in the same season. They weren't the most beautiful of finals, both against Sheffield Wednesday, but I was pleased because in my first full season at Highbury I'd won the Golden Boot, which I'd always wanted to win, and in my second season we won two cups. So I got something to show for playing for Arsenal, whatever they say."

## **First confrontation with George Graham**

"Actually, we got on very well. He was a hard taskmaster, but if you were performing he would let you play, and usually my goals saved me from his anger. I remember a story. I was on the pitch – I can't remember the game – and Kevin Campbell was on the bench. George was slaughtering me, Kevin told me later. He'd got my number ready to substitute me. And then I scored. He had to put the number back, swearing, and leave me on the pitch. When Kevin told me, I just laughed.

"The first major argument we had was after the European Cup Winners' Cup semi-final against Paris St Germain when I got booked and so would miss the final. We had a bust-up in the dressing room. It would have been brilliant to play, especially as the press were going on about Arsenal not doing well – and me not

scoring – in European competitions. And I did even better on the next run to the final when we lost to Real Zaragoza. I scored in every round.

"George? He wasn't frightening. He wasn't a stare-you-in-the-eyes sort of frightening. He was just angry. Sometimes we'd be 2-0 up at half-time and he'd still come in shouting and passionate for us to keep going. I think it was his way of not letting us get complacent in the second half. But we knew what we had to do. Sometimes I found that attitude pretty confusing."

## **First love at Highbury**

"Arriving, walking up the marble steps, going in through the door and seeing Herbert Chapman's bust in front of me. It made you feel special to be part of it. I used to love walking out of the tunnel for the warm-up. Seeing all the familiar faces. I always used to mess around with the ticket office, before getting going on the pitch. I used to look forward to that. Seeing all the stewards as you were walking through. Getting your boots ready. All that preparation for the game was brilliant. On a match day, there was a different kind of vibe in the air. Those heated tiles. When you listen to a lot of players and they tell you their favourite away ground, a lot said Highbury. I'd get in, have a bath and then walk around on the lovely warm tiles. Then I'd go out for the warm-up. Everybody would stand up and love you. I'd sign a few autographs for the kids. Sometimes I'd give them a training top. I'd always try and make it special for them as well. Maybe this would be a game I scored in. Do my silly celebration. We win. It's all fairytale stuff. It's a pity it had to end.

"I had so many silly celebrations, I don't know which one was the worst. I had one where I was just spinning, spinning, spinning to the ground until I fell over. I think that was in a game against Nottingham Forest. There was one where I just went and hugged the post because I loved the goal so much. I never did anything with the corner flag though. I always thought: why run all the way over there? I don't like rehearsed goal celebrations. That's not spontaneous. It's such a pure feeling scoring a goal; you can't have rehearsed celebrations."

## **First written T-shirt**

"The first one I ever wrote was: 'I love the Lads'. I did. I loved them. Then I wrote: 'I love the FA' because they let me off with something. Then they charged me with something else, so I wrote: 'I don't love the FA.' So it was all a good

laugh."

## Greatest goal

"It was the over-the-head, over-the-head, overthe-head one. That was my favourite. We were at home to Everton and there was a long clearance, a goal kick I think, that fell to me. I pulled it over Matt Jackson's head once, then I pulled it over again, and then as Neville Southall was standing there in the Everton goal, I pulled it over his head. So it went bang, bang and over. And when I watched later, you could hear clapping, real clapping, like people had just seen something really special. There was a buzz. When you scored a good goal at Arsenal, Tony Adams used to wait for you at the half-way line to shake your hand. If Tony Adams and Steve Bould were waiting there for you, you knew. You could sense the ripple round the ground.

"So that was my greatest goal, but I scored a lovely goal against Swindon Town when I chipped it in from about 30 yards and it went right in the corner. Then there was the nice chip against Yeovil Town. Another against Newcastle United where the goalie came out and lay down; he thought I was going to slot it past him. A defender slid in and I chipped it over the both of them. That was a good goal. I like that sort of stuff. It's cheek and clever at the same time. It's like Marlon Brando, a combination of macho and vulnerability. I heard someone say that about him once. And I thought: 'Yeah, I understand that.'

"Those goals weren't a mystery though. When you practised, practised, practised, when you literally put yourself in every goalscoring position that could possibly arise in a match, you were properly prepared. I was ready for all of them. It's how you execute those goalscoring opportunities: that's the difference between a good goalscorer and a great goalscorer.

"When somebody scores and he makes it look easy, like Dennis Bergkamp, he's got the touch of a master. He's an artist. He's composed. I remember Steve Coppell once telling me that you have to go cold in the box. Go cold. That's what I had. The ability to be hot and cold at the same time. What I'm pleased about is that I did have the ability to explode in the box or shoot from 25 yards or go oneon-one with goalkeepers – I never used to go round goalkeepers because I thought that was showboating too much. I never went round a goalkeeper unless I had to. I wasn't into making people look silly. It's recognising when you need to blast and when you need to slot the ball. What I liked was shooting before the goalkeeper was set, or toe poke it, or curl it in. I liked it when I went through on goal. If you look back on the tapes, when I went

through on goal, people like Paul Merson had their arms up already. If you look at the FA Cup Final replay against Sheffield Wednesday when I'm going through on Paul Warhurst and Carlton Palmer, their defenders, you can see that Merson's already got his arms up and I ain't even scored yet. Because they knew that I was going to score. I never went through thinking I was going to miss. I didn't dither. I hate dithering in a forward."

## **First man to break Cliff Bastin's goal-scoring record**

"It could have been the most embarrassing moment of my whole life because as I scored that first goal against Bolton Wanderers on September 13, 1997, in one mad moment I thought: 'That's it! I've broken the record.' But I hadn't. I'd just equalled it. I'd only scored 178 Arsenal goals, but I lifted my shirt up anyway. Underneath was the T-shirt that said: '179 Just Done It'. It was just the excitement because I hadn't scored for three or four games going in. I just couldn't help myself. Even as I was running around like crazy with my shirt lifted up, I didn't realise what I'd done, even when I got back to the centre circle because I was so excited.

"So, obviously, I needed to score another goal to save myself from feeling stupid and finally break Cliff Bastin's record. When it came, it was the easiest goal of my whole career. It started on the halfway line. I was running with a defender but he tripped up – his feet had caught the front of mine – and I jumped over him. Meanwhile, Dennis has a shot, it rebounds to Patrick and all this time I'm running parallel into the penalty area. Then Patrick slid in with a defender and the ball is just trickling agonisingly slowly towards the goal. All I had to do was run in and tap this goal for the greatest moment of my life. It wasn't even a foot away. In the end – I like a drama – I scored a hat-trick in the game. The third one was a side-foot volley from a David Platt pass. It was just unbelievable. I didn't know what to do then because I'd done all my celebrating with my shirt. I hadn't got another T-shirt with '180 goals' on it.

"The fans waited for me outside afterwards and it was just unbelievable. I threw everything to them. Even the famous T-shirt, which got torn to pieces down there. I haven't got one single thing from that any more. Nothing. But I'm sure whoever's got the stuff, it will mean more to them now than it would to me. I've got the memories. That's enough."

## **First heard that Thierry Henry overtakes his goalscoring record**

"I didn't hate the moment in October 2005 because you could see it coming. It's like your car has broken down on the motorway and you can see headlights coming from a distance. I'd stopped at 185 Arsenal goals by the time I went to West Ham and now Thierry was coming from 20, 10, five, one mile away and he was going to take it. I was ready for it.

"It helped that I know Thierry. He's a nice guy, the fans love him, he's a legend. But I remember he said something once, like this: 'No matter what I do, I hope the Arsenal fans would love me as much as they loved Ian Wright'. He knows what I mean to the fans and what the fans mean to me. I know his heart's in the right place and I know he's worthy. You don't get to break a record, become one of the world's great strikers, win a World Cup, reach the Champions League final without being a good player.

"To be eclipsed by a player with that career is not the worst thing in the world. I don't like coming second to anybody. But if I am going to come in second, it's not bad to come in second to Thierry. It's hard to take, but you just have to say you've been beaten by the better man."

## **Farewell to the North Bank**

"I scored a hat-trick then as well. I am so pleased I got a season in front of the North Bank. Only one. But what a one it was."

Wright gave the North Bank, that hotbed of Arsenal fervour for decades, the send-off it richly deserved. It was the end of the 1991/1992 season and the competition for the First Division Golden Boot was a two-horse race between himself and Gary Lineker. A fabulous study of contrasts. Mr Right versus Mr Wright, the saint versus the sinner, the prodigious versus the prodigal. All those analogies rang true.

However, with five minutes of the game remaining against Southampton, Arsenal were leading 3-1 (Wright had scored with a penalty) and the game was petering to a gentle, saddening, unremarkable close. Lineker, with his strike at Manchester United, had apparently won the Golden Boot. The mood was one of deflation.

Yet Arsenal's irrepressible, ebullient, and ungovernable striker decided not to go quietly after all. He dropped back into his own half, where he picked up a throw from Seaman. Immediately he embarked on a fulminating run, seeing off Southampton defender Terry Hurlock, and discharging a shot that beat Tim Flowers in goal through willpower as much as force. The crowd went appropriately berserk. It was like a rendition of *Rule Britannia* at the Last Night

of the Proms.

But Wright had unfinished business. Thirty seconds later he completed his hat-trick, shinning the ball into the net from a square pass from Kevin Campbell. Mayhem. A volcanic eruption of celebration, emotion, pride and applause. Part thespian, part warrior, part lad, he had captured the occasion and made it his own. Then he shared the spoils with the fans and everyone went home delighted. He won the Golden Boot, by the way.

## **First pay packet**

"In those days it wasn't the 50 grand a week that footballers earn in the 21st century. I can't remember exactly what I earned, but let me tell you this: I went to Arsenal for all the right reasons. Not the money. It was all about football and wanting to do well at a big club. It was purely and genuinely just wanting to achieve great things at a great club."

## **First impressions of Bruce Rioch**

"When George went and Rioch arrived from Bolton, it is no secret that we didn't get on. I would say that all the arguments he had with me were ill-founded. I wasn't a 'Big Time Charlie'. I didn't have a chip on my shoulder. I was a great team man. It was all about the team with me. Even when I was scoring and it was all: 'Ian Wright, Wright, Wright', the song they used to sing, I really tried to rebuke people about that. I used to talk about the team all the time.

"It's true that Rioch had instigated a great Bolton win over us over two games in the 1993/1994 FA Cup and the board must have been impressed, but his methods and management didn't suit me. I was a professional man, a professional player who loved every minute of playing for Arsenal. But in the end, I was driven to putting in a transfer request. I can't play football unhappy. I was depressed going into training. It is no good calling people Big Time Charlies – the fact of the matter is, we're in the big time. You have to rise to the challenge at a club like Arsenal and never let your resentment boil over. But then before you knew it, he was gone."

## **First impressions of Arsène Wenger**

"I'd heard people like Glenn Hoddle and George Weah speaking about Arsène

Wenger, and how great he was, but how did I know? I didn't know. And when he came, he was just very cool, very calm. He didn't look like a football manager. He looked like a science teacher. But a science teacher with a glint in his eye. I suspected straight away he had something. I am just so sorry I couldn't have had Arsène as a manager for a longer period of my football career. I would not have left. But in the end, he thought it was best for me to leave. He makes decisions for the Club. He thought it was good for me, at the stage I was, to go to West Ham. He told me I'd always be a legend at Arsenal. He said I would always be welcome around the Club.

"That's why, when people ask me if I feel bitter about not being brought on as substitute in the 1998 Cup Final against Newcastle when we were already winning 2-0, I say: 'Not one bit'. But you see, it's the same as when Hoddle told me I was going to go to the 1998 World Cup Finals and then didn't take me. You can sit back and lament that things didn't go well for you: 'Oh, my God. I'm so gutted he didn't play in the World Cup or the FA Cup Final.' But so what. Let it go. Arsène Wenger extended my football career by two years. The way he trained me and the way he made me think about training, and about delivering the goods on a Saturday, were fantastic. He treated you like a man and you had to accept his decisions like an adult and that's what I did. And he's still doing that now at Arsenal. I'm not bitter about that. I've got two FA Cup winner's medals, and one loser's medal from my time with Crystal Palace, so I haven't got a problem."

## **First thoughts on all-foreign Arsenal team**

"I never expected to see that day. I was very disappointed that we did field an all-foreign side, including the substitutes. I'm English, born in Woolwich and it was very weird. Because you're talking about a London club not having an Englishman in the team, and, what's more, not having a Londoner either. I suppose that's the way football decided to go. Of course, the fans were quite happy with the success that they brought and the unbelievable flair. They sing 'Boring, Boring Arsenal' now as a joke. That is what those players have brought to it.

"But I believe you still want to be getting players from the radius of north London. The trouble is they're hard to find. I have to accept that. There are a lot of foreign players in the Arsenal youth team as well, so you have to worry about that. Maybe I was part of the last generation of Londoners that made it into a team like Arsenal. But Arsenal fans will love anybody in a red and white shirt

that's doing well. As long as they love playing for Arsenal, as long as they tap into what it means to play for Arsenal, then it doesn't matter where they come from."

### **The last game at Highbury**

"It was amazing to be a part of it. When you look at the number of players that have gone through Highbury, just to be mentioned as a legend there is unbelievable. It really is. There were a lot of players who went to Highbury with big hopes of being great and it just didn't happen, for whatever reason. So to be there at the last ever game, the fans still loving you, giving you a send-off, was really special. It was really quite emotional and it will stay with me forever. I had a tear in my eye because I was part of something that was very special to a lot of people. I loved playing football. I am a football fan. I'm one of them. All the things I did were driven by passion."

### **First and last dream come true**

"If someone came along and said to me when I was working as a labourer for Greenwich Borough Council: 'You're 19 and I know you've just been refused by Brighton, but what's going to happen next is ... you're going to go to Crystal Palace, do really well there, play in an FA Cup Final after breaking your leg twice, play for England, sign for Arsenal, become their greatest goalscorer ever and become a legend at Highbury. Are you happy with that?' Do you know what I'd have said? I'd have said: 'To be honest, I'm not in the mood for jokes, right!'"

**Sue Mott**



## INTERVIEW

# **The Romford Pelé**

**A happy-go-lucky ray Parlour lived life to the full, until he decided to knuckle down and make the most of his talent. He went on to play his best football under Arsène wenger**

"Want any funny stories? I've got loads of 'em." It's the first thing Ray Parlour says when we meet for a chat, as befits a man known for his great sense of humour. Top stuff. I was hoping he would say something like that. Given the thumbs-up, my old team-mate launches into the first of several comical tales from his time at Arsenal.

George Graham, Arsène Wenger, Martin Keown, his own drunken escapades with Tony Adams: they all get a mention somewhere along the line. For some anecdotes, the narrator stands up to illustrate his point more animatedly, and all come accompanied by the infectious laugh that helped make Parlour such a popular figure during 15 years at Highbury. This is, of course, the popular image of Parlour – the cheeky Essex chappy who never took life too seriously.

Always game for a laugh, loved a bet and a drink on his seemingly random path through professional football. A popular image, perhaps, but it doesn't tell the full story. Yes, 'The Romford Pelé' could take the mickey with the best of them – he would rarely pass up the chance for a good-natured wind-up – but that flippant side to his character masks a single-minded streak. Nobody stays at a club like Arsenal for so long without possessing a fierce determination. The only difference with Parlour is that he hid it very well.

You have got to admire Parlour's capacity for change and a talent that slowly developed under two Arsenal managers before reaching full bloom under a man many thought would discard this happy-go-lucky soul. From being a peripheral figure under George Graham, a squad player in the main, Parlour began to emerge as a more serious proposition during Bruce Rioch's single season in charge. Under Wenger, he took it one step further by becoming an important regular, a top-class midfielder who embraced the Frenchman's ways, having realised it was time to get his act together.

That change required a lot of gumption from Parlour – something for which he is not always given enough credit. He did what many other errant footballers have found impossible to achieve. He managed to step back and take a long look at himself. Not only that, he decisively acted upon what he saw. Rioch's arrival marked the start of that change. A month or two before, Parlour had added to his list of misdemeanours by getting himself arrested on an end-of-season trip to Hong Kong after a drunken altercation with a taxi driver. There was no malice

involved. There never has been with Parlour. It was just one more in a long line of antics when too much alcohol got him into trouble. On returning to London, though, the embarrassed perpetrator found himself being given another chance.

"When Bruce took over he said he didn't care what had happened before," Parlour recalls, getting serious for a moment. "It was a clean slate for everyone, but if I did the same that year I'd be in trouble. Bruce gave me a three-year contract and I did really well that season. After that I knuckled down a bit. I realised that I was going to regret it if I didn't change. [I was] 24 or 25 at the time. If you're not good enough, fine, but at least have a proper go. I knew I'd regret it when I was 45, thinking I could have done a lot better at Arsenal. When you get to 28 it's too late. I realised I still had four or five good years in front of me."

And what good years they were. Parlour hardly missed a game during Wenger's first full season in charge, the memorable 1997/1998 campaign when one of the most impressive sides in Arsenal's long history clinched the League and FA Cup Double. "It was brilliant. I was training hard and playing every week. Don't get me wrong, I still went out and enjoyed myself, but it was more controlled, at the right times."

His place cemented, the blond, curly-haired figure on the right-hand side of midfield was dovetailing beautifully with Patrick Vieira, Emmanuel Petit and Marc Overmars in a harmonious quartet that went virtually untouched in seeing the team all the way to Wembley. As man of the match in that 2-0 win over Newcastle, Parlour set up Nicolas Anelka for the second goal. Best of all, though, he was voted the Arsenal Supporters' Player of the Year, a highly prestigious award that sees your name inscribed on a giant plaque along with all the other winners from the Club's illustrious past. "I was really proud of that. Dennis Bergkamp was unbelievable that year, he played out of his skin, but I managed to nick it ahead of him."

Keen to find out the reasons for this sharp upturn in fortunes, fans would regularly ask the player what he was doing differently. "Nothing really," Parlour would reply. "I'm just enjoying my football and the team's clicking."

It wasn't quite as simple as that, of course. Call it the onset of maturity or the penny finally dropping, but Parlour was now delivering the goods week after week. He had become, in short, a top-class performer. Stamina and fitness had never been a problem, but a healthier lifestyle made him noticeably stronger. You could see that just by looking at the definition in his legs, which were so much more muscular than a couple of years previously. Not only that, but his natural intelligence as a footballer was allowing him to conform from a tactical point of view. Seizing the opportunity, he did everything he was asked to do as a

key part of that brilliant midfield.

"You had to be a runner to play on the wing," he says. "Arsène was very clever how he did it because he knew I wasn't as good at attacking as Marc Overmars was on the left wing, so he played me tucked in and asked me to break wide when we got the ball. It worked great because Marc would stay up front – he scored 16 goals that year – and I would tuck inside, Manu [Petit] would move across, Patrick would move across and I'd play as a third central midfield player."

Even after Petit and Overmars were tempted by the lure of Barcelona, Parlour kept going as an immensely reliable contributor, instrumental in the Club's second Double in four years. Having scored a memorable long-range effort against Chelsea in the 2002 FA Cup Final, he was man of the match four days later when the title was won at Old Trafford. Of that spectacular strike in Cardiff, he modestly says: "I ran through the middle and when I looked around no one had come with me. I was thinking: 'What shall I do?' I'd have probably passed it if someone was there, but the only thing I could do was have a shot."

Parlour didn't get many of those. If there was a flaw in his game it was that he didn't score often enough. That is partly why he was feeling on top of the world that Saturday evening as the team headed for the airport and their flight back to London. "I remember getting on the plane with my family and ordering the champagne. 'No champagne!' Wenger said. 'Not till Wednesday when we win the League.' We had to go up to Manchester United. Those four days were probably the best that I had at Arsenal. The feeling after that was unbelievable. There's nothing better in the world – sitting in that dressing room thinking: 'Jesus, what an amazing few days I've just had'."

He had certainly come a long way and learnt a great deal since one nervous afternoon, 11 years before, when, out of the blue, the 18-year-old was asked to join the first team at their Norwich hotel in readiness for the following day's game at Carrow Road. "Someone fell ill or something and I had to get the train up. Someone picked me up from the station and took me to the hotel."

As was tradition, the new boy was required to say a few words. Parlour can remember the occasion clearly. Some of the first-team lads mischievously suggested that the teenager should mention in his speech the natty little waistcoat George Graham was wearing that day. After dinner that night, the youngster stood up. "So there's the boss thinking he looks really smart when this young kid says: 'By the way boss, the boys really like yer waistcoat.' He can't believe it and looks at me a bit funny. Straight away I'm thinking: 'Oh no, what have I said'."

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the youth team product stayed on the bench the

following day and had to wait until March 29, 1992 for his full debut when Graham picked him for a tussle at Liverpool. On that day the rookie did pretty well in central midfield, even though he fouled Jan Molby to concede a penalty in a game Arsenal eventually lost 2-0. "My dad came up in the car with Steve Rowley [the chief scout] and he was more nervous than me. Anfield was some place to start my career."

Though he was in and out of the squad for the rest of that season, the following few years saw Parlour become a regular part of the firstteam scene as he paired up with Tony Adams, another Romford lad, to keep bars and clubs in business throughout the south-east. By anyone's standards, it was a pretty wild time. Egged on by each other, this terrible twosome got into more than their fair share of scrapes – episodes that would be described the next day in detail to their amused team-mates on the training ground. One of their infamous escapades occurred on Christmas Eve, when he and Adams popped into one of their favourite watering holes, a hotel called Palms in Hornchurch. Suddenly, the younger man remembered, to his horror, that he hadn't bought his mum a Christmas present. Chuckling at the memory, Parlour recalls: "Tone says: 'Don't worry we'll get her a present later. Let's have a few beers first.' So we're all in there and the atmosphere's buzzing. We're having a great time and I've totally forgotten about the time. Suddenly it's 5 o'clock. 'I'd better go,' I said, but Tone says we'll go after we've finished our pints. Come 6 o'clock, we still hadn't moved. What am I going to do now? So Tone asks me what kind of thing my mum likes. 'Don't know,' I said. 'Anything really.' Then, at exactly the same time, we've both looked across at this big plant pot in the corner. 'Yeah, that'll do,' I say, so we've carried it outside – really heavy it was – and put it in the boot of my car, then gone back into the bar. I've got my mum a present. Happy days!

"When I came back in the morning to pick up my car, there were police all around it. 'Is this your car?' they say. 'Can you open the boot please?' Apparently, the manager of the bar had seen us carrying the plant pot off and called the police. I tried to make out I'd given my keys to my mates and they'd done it as a joke, but that didn't work. Anyway, we had to report to the police station the next week. 'Here comes Bill and Ben,' they said as we walked through the door. The manager didn't press charges, but we were known as the Flowerpot Men for a bit after that." Back at Arsenal, George Graham wasn't too impressed by the continued shenanigans. "I seemed to get fined two weeks wages every week! I think I owed them money once."

Then came the moment that helped quieten Parlour down. His great pal and drinking buddy, Adams, publicly declared himself an alcoholic and resolved to seek help. "That was a blessing in disguise for me," Ray admits. "He was going

home and doing other things in the afternoons, so I didn't go out as much." The player concentrated instead on his football and an adventure with Wenger that just got better and better. Winning became a habit as the trophies piled up. "We didn't know when we were going to lose our next game. That's a massive thing in football. Sometimes you look at the opposition in the tunnel and you can see that they're nervous as anything. Then you've won the game already."

One aspect of Wenger's reign that doesn't always come across is the fun everyone had behind the scenes. More often than not, a winning camp is a happy camp and Parlour says that Wenger has a really dry sense of humour and would often join in with the banter. Conversely, the players would occasionally have a laugh at the gaffer's expense, as most teams do with their manager at some time or other. In this respect, Parlour was more responsible than anyone, since it was he who nicknamed the boss 'Cluso' after Inspector Clouseau in the Pink Panther films, on account of Wenger's occasional practical mishaps.

"We were in a hotel one time and were all sat having dinner the night before a game against Aston Villa. Arsène walks up to get his dessert – apple pie it was. He puts it on his plate and as he turns around to walk back the pie slips off and on to the floor. We've all seen this, but the boss hasn't noticed so he carries on walking back to his seat. He sits down, picks up his spoon and looks down at the empty plate. You should have seen the look on his face."

Parlour's got a million of those: moments when accidents befell the unsuspecting Frenchman. Such as the time a conservatory window whacked Wenger on the head in Germany, or the time Kolo Touré arrived as a triallist and accidentally ploughed into his prospective boss on the touchline. Then there was the time when Parlour wound up Martin Keown a treat on the last day of the season. With the title sewn up and the veteran defender needing one more appearance to get his medal, his fellow substitute decided to have a little fun.

"Two of the subs have already gone on when Martin says: 'Oh, I'd better go and warm up just in case the boss forgets.' So he's sprinting up and down the line and doing his stretches when I run past him saying that the gaffer's told me I'm going on because Gilberto's struggling and he wants another midfielder. Martin's going mad, saying he's got to go on otherwise he won't get his medal. Then the fans clocked it in the East Lower stand and they're all laughing. I've gone to the touchline and taken my top off. So Martin's sprinted to the dugout, grabbed Wenger round the throat and screamed: 'You can't do it boss, you can't do it!' The fans were on the floor, but the gaffer didn't know what was going on."

In Parlour, the supporters had seen one of their own graduate through the ranks, seen him step over the mark on several occasions before getting to grips

with his life and career. It was a feelgood story to warm the coldest hearts. Parlour had stuck around against all the odds.

But when it all came to an end after 15 years, the player was just about ready. "Middlesbrough offered me a three-year contract and I didn't know what Arsenal were going to do. I was going through all the hassle of my divorce at the time, so it was probably good to get out of London. It was a tough decision to leave, mind. Harder than deciding whether I wanted to leave my wife!" Typical Parlour. Joking to the end, the kind of character who is invaluable in any dressing room.

Yet ask him to be serious, to sum up the apparent metamorphosis from party animal to model pro and he plays down the point. "People said I'd changed, but I hadn't really. I just learned when to go out and when not to. The first two or three years of my career were a waste because I was out drinking all the time. Me and Tony were like twins. Wherever he went, I went. Don't get me wrong, it was great fun, but from a career point of view it wasn't a good thing."

Over time he came to realise what couldn't be ignored. "Those two or three hours in the morning are so important because that's what improves you. I've always trained how I played; I think Wenger liked that. Whether it was rainy, sunny or cold, I always put it in. Unlike some players, I could never just turn it on and off."

Yes, there's an awful lot of substance lurking under the comic façade. Ray Parlour knew the score. That's what kept him going for so long.

**Alan Smith**



## INTERVIEW

# **Leading Seaman**

**As the last line of defence, the consistent David Seaman played a central role in ensuring Arsenal's solidity at the back, becoming a key figure for both Club and country**

No figure in sport is as vulnerable to public opinion as a goalkeeper, at any level, from public park to the World Cup. Save a penalty, and you are acclaimed a hero. Be deemed to have misjudged a long shot, and you can be demonised as a villain. David Seaman experienced both in his 20 years in football – the last 13 of which he served as one of the most distinguished goalkeepers in the history of the game. Seaman shares an elite position in Britain, alongside such legendary figures as Gordon Banks and Pat Jennings. The distinguishing feature of most great goalkeepers is the calmness of their judgment and Seaman possessed an owl-like equanimity that inspired and reassured his colleagues in front of him.

There is no hiding place. So when, approaching the age of 40, and under the gaze of a global television audience, Seaman – as proud of his international reputation as any sportsman can be – was perceived to have been at fault for Ronaldinho's goal for Brazil in the 2002 World Cup quarter-final, he wept at the finish. With that special brand of emotional cruelty which is peculiar to sport, the moment would be remembered by many as almost the last act in a career of countless unblemished displays. But in retirement, his reputation remains unimpaired among those who love the game and understand the complexities of a goalkeeper's unique art.

Nor was it the first time he had cried. There had been less conspicuous occasions, he will say, earlier in his long career. "When it first happens," he reflects, "you dare not even go outdoors. You stay in, because you suppose everyone is aware of what you've done. And when eventually you start going out, you suddenly realise that not everyone follows football."

Going in goal in makeshift games in the school playground is usually the duffer's job, the last one wanted by those who seek to shine. Seaman, born in Rotherham in 1963, was tall for his age and therefore a natural for the least coveted position. He quickly discovered he enjoyed it. "I didn't know I was good, but thought I might do something," he remembers, with a touch of modesty. As a teenager he might have pursued his chance as a bowler in Yorkshire cricket, but chose football. "At the time, I knew I was a better goalkeeper than I was a bowler," he concedes. Attracting the attention of Leeds United, he set out on a professional career, but by one of those errors of judgment common to football clubs when assessing young players, he was

released at 19 without having appeared in the first team. He joined Peterborough and became a regular, before being sold to Birmingham City for £100,000. After a couple of seasons, Birmingham cashed in on his improving form by transferring him to Queens Park Rangers, then in the old First Division. Yet such was his advance that he was soon attracting the attention of Arsenal. A deal was done in 1990, only to fall through initially when John Lukic, then Arsenal's goalkeeper, rejected his part in an exchange deal. Seaman's move was ultimately completed during the close season when he joined Arsenal for £1.3 million, while Lukic returned to Leeds United, one of his previous clubs.

The launch of Seaman's Arsenal career began with a visit to Wimbledon on August 25, 1990, at that time the troublesome hustlers of the top division. "I knew I was under pressure, coming from QPR, a lesser club, because John Lukic was still something of a hero at Highbury. The crowd were understandably uncertain about me, so I had to win them over. We played Wolves away during the pre-season preparations, and I had an adequate game. When we won 3-0 at Wimbledon I immediately felt comfortable. I was pretty sound on crosses, luckily had quite a good game and I soon seemed to win some affection at Highbury."

The circumstances for a new keeper were opportune. He was playing behind an established back line of Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn. In front of them was the Paul Davis-Michael Thomas-David Rocastle midfield, with a front line of Anders Limpar, Alan Smith and Paul Merson. Stability, more than glamour, was Arsenal's trademark and this was to be immediately enhanced by Seaman's arrival. Ever present throughout the League programme, he conceded only 18 goals as Arsenal marched to the title with only one defeat, something not achieved for 100 years. It was an exceptional debut, with 24 clean sheets, 10 further matches with only a single goal conceded and a mere four – in away games at Leeds and Chelsea and at home to Wimbledon and Manchester City – in which the opposition scored twice. The architect of this collective performance was, of course, George Graham, who had already led the Club to their first title for 18 years in 1989, following victory in the League Cup two years earlier.

"It was a decent squad, though perhaps not the best in the world, but George got the most out of it," Seaman says. "Yes, there was a lot of long-ball stuff, but he taught me exactly where to serve the ball, to throw to certain areas, mostly down the opposition's left-hand side. Sometimes, if their right-back was small, we'd go for the other flank. He was very organised. There was endless training, particularly of the back four, with me behind them, and it worked really well. In fact, my best season for Arsenal was probably my first, letting in only those 18

goals, which was wonderful for me to have such a start."

Such was Seaman's impression of his new home that in his autobiography, published 10 years later, he would assert: "George Graham is the best club manager I've played for – just count the trophies he brought to Arsenal. I've been very impressed with Arsène Wenger [appointed in 1996], and he could become even better, but he's not been here long enough to rate him ahead of George."

Seaman's next milestones were to be the winning of both the FA Cup and League Cup in 1993. The previous season they had finished fourth in the League behind Leeds and suffered one of those intermittent aberrations when losing 2-1 away to Wrexham in the third round of the FA Cup. League performances now slid further, with Arsenal finishing 10th behind Manchester United, but, after a grinding season of Cup warfare, involving 17 matches including five replays, they played Sheffield Wednesday in both finals. Having won the first with goals by Steve Morrow and Paul Merson, they achieved the Cup Double in a replay with goals by Ian Wright and, improbably, central defender Andy Linighan, a replacement for Bould. Overall Seaman was to enjoy the rewards of nine trophies: one Football League and two Premiership titles, four FA Cup victories and one each in the League Cup and European Cup Winners' Cup.

Were Cup occasions more exciting and dramatic than achievements in the League? "The pressure is greater in a cup-tie, a oneoff. The FA Cup Final, in particular, is a brilliant experience because it involves the whole week that leads up to the match, the preparations at Highbury, the day itself, putting on the new suit for the occasion. Personally, I'm so glad that replays for the final have gone, I feel the drama of the day should be completed, even if it's with penalties. Of course, it's a great day for the fans, winning the Cup, but as a player the one you want is definitely the League, because that defines the team. The Cup involves just a handful of games; in the Premiership there are 38 games, and the League table never lies. The most satisfying Cup victory for me, as with the League, was my first – a great memory because it was against Wednesday, and a lot of my friends from Yorkshire were Wednesday fans."

During the 1993/1994 season, League performances improved again, with Arsenal finishing fourth behind Manchester United. Though Seaman let in only 28 goals compared with United's 38, in attack United were hugely superior: 80 goals to Arsenal's 53. Nonetheless, Arsenal found themselves in the Cup Winners' Cup Final in Copenhagen facing Parma, who boasted Faustino Asprilla and Gianfranco Zola in attack and the Swedish midfield maestro, Tomas Brodin. Though outwitted in several phases of the game, Arsenal, with Smith and Kevin Campbell forming the frontline, won the Cup thanks to Smith's smart volley

from 20 yards, after controlling a pass on his chest. "Not long before the final, I'd cracked three ribs playing against QPR, and needed pain-killing injections in Copenhagen," says Seaman. "When we went to inspect the pitch beforehand, they were testing the electronic screen, and had Parma up on the board as winners. That gave us a bit of added incentive. I had to make one of my best saves, maybe the best – certainly one of the most important – a fierce early drive by Zola that I managed to turn over the bar, even though it was on my right side where the injured ribs were."

Defence of this title the following season, however, was to bring Seaman one of those moments of disaster that befall goalkeepers, and of which he was to experience more than his fair share. To reach the final again, Arsenal had to survive a penalty shoot-out against Sampdoria in the semi-final, and not for the first, or last, time Seaman proved himself an expert in this aspect of contemporary football, which has nothing to do with the play that precedes it. Seaman saved three times, from Sinisa Mihajlovic, Vladimir Jugovic and Attilio Lombardo, to see Arsenal through to the final in Paris. "You just watch how the striker runs up to the spot, not the ball, trying to guess the right way to go, and not to move too early, which makes the taker's mind up for him. The longer you wait, the more likely you are to detect his intentions. Fortunately for me the third save, from Lombardo, was placed close to me, so was fairly straightforward."

The final in Paris, against Real Zaragoza, was also heading for penalties. With a matter of seconds remaining at the end of extra time, temporary manager Stewart Houston was already choosing his penalty takers. As play oscillated around the half-way line, Seaman was positioned way out of goal, to act as sweeper in the event of a long ball played through behind his backline. Suddenly Nayim, Zaragoza's Spanish-Moroccan player, spotted Seaman's advanced position, and attempted a million-to-one lofted kick towards the distant, yawning goal. The ball sailed above the desperate goalkeeper, who was scrambling back to reach the 50-yard lob, but was unable to gain more than a touch as he and ball tumbled into the net.

Seaman was devastated. Do such moments stay with a goalkeeper? Can the memory be erased? "It was a high-profile moment, of course. As a goalkeeper, you have to learn to live with mistakes, and for sure you're going to make them. In the first minute afterwards, you're wondering, can you carry on playing well? Do you go to bits? It's how well you react straight afterwards that determines whether you're any good. In this instance there could be no reprieve. It was the last kick of the match. I was positioned to step up as sweeper, but as soon as Nayim hit it, I knew I was in trouble. Nayim meant it, though, and you've got to give him credit for that. It hurts. It was the first time I'd been beaten in a final."

Houston, almost as stunned as his tearful goalkeeper, was swift to defend Seaman. "I feel for him, because he was the one who got us to the final. He'd played well tonight and made a series of outstanding saves early on in the second half."

The compensation for Seaman was that by now he was the established custodian for England. He had made his first, isolated appearance in 1988 against Saudi Arabia, when Peter Shilton was unavailable, and had been included as second choice to Shilton in Bobby Robson's World Cup squad for Italy in 1990, before dropping out through injury. He was then controversially passed over by Graham Taylor for Euro 1992 in Sweden, when relegated to third choice behind Chris Woods and Nigel Martyn. Seaman returned to favour with Taylor on account of his Highbury form, in 1993/1994, but was blamed for one of the goals, by Ronald Koeman, in the 2-0 away defeat to Holland, in a World Cup qualifier that had effectively ended Taylor's chequered reign. Seaman subsequently found himself firmly restored as England's number one under the direction of Terry Venables, who succeeded Taylor in 1994.

"I felt the best of the England managers I encountered was Venables, and England's involvement, as hosts in the finals of Euro 96, was a massive part of my life. It was a great time to be playing for England. I managed to make a few important saves, especially the penalty by Gary McAllister when we played Scotland, and then the shoot-out penalty by Miguel Angel Nadal in our quarter-final against Spain. I'd needed to make another save against Scotland, a diving header by Gordon Durie just inside the post. I got one hand to it, but needed to make sure it missed the post and didn't rebound into play, and badly bruised myself colliding with the post. When we outplayed Holland it could have been different when, at one-nil, Dennis Bergkamp beat the offside trap and was one-on-one with me. The secret in these situations is to stand up and wait, not to move too early, to make the player make his shot. I knew how good Dennis was from Highbury training. It didn't look as good a save as the one from Durie, but I thought it was better.

"Those were great times, and great memories. Terry made it such fun and created a relaxed atmosphere. He was a footballer's manager, wanting to play the game properly, and earned immediate respect. I loved playing for England and I think it showed, right from the start. When Taylor selected Nigel Martyn rather than me as reserve for 1992, I told him I was disgusted, that it was a rubbish decision."

Back at Highbury, Bruce Rioch, the former midfield star of Derby and Scotland who had just left his job as manager of Bolton Wanderers, had been appointed as Graham's successor. With Campbell departing for Nottingham

Forest and Smith having retired with cartilage trouble, his immediate action was to sign Dennis Bergkamp from Internazionale, together with David Platt from Sampdoria. Yet Rioch's reign was to be the shortest in Arsenal's history – a mere 14 months – and riddled with controversy. "It was a strange appointment, and he didn't stay very long. Rioch tried a lot of different ways, but it just didn't work. The job seemed a little bit too big for him. We finished fifth in the Premiership, but he had a number of problems with Ian Wright, all starting when Rioch called him a 'Big Time Charlie' in front of other players during pre-season training. There were rows with other players: John Hartson, Nigel Winterburn and Martin Keown. Rioch was a confrontational person. It affected the team, and although I'm easy-going, I know it affected me. We all realised he was out of his league as a manager."

The Arsenal board had wanted to appoint Arsène Wenger well before Rioch's abrupt dismissal, but at the time the Frenchman was committed to a contract in Japan. When Wenger did join, in September 1996, he was to start a revolution at Highbury. "He changed absolutely everything – the training, the diet, the pre-match routine, the way we played the game. He gave us a whole new lease of life. For example, Tony Adams, so long established, had been known before for just getting stuck in, yet within a few months Tony was playing the ball out of the back line, spreading it around everywhere. At the same time, Wenger was bringing in new players who nobody knew much about, such as Patrick Vieira. We never knew what to expect in training; it was different every day. With George, the squad would be tearing their hair out with the endless repetition in training. The biggest change with Arsène was the style of play. We were all fed up with the chants of 'boring Arsenal', and now we were playing the ball out of defence through midfield. Everyone had more individual responsibility. It was as much a matter of being told not what to do, but what not to do, and to play it on the ground. Wenger knows everything about the game, he's obsessed with it, including the medical side and the sports science side. And he's a gentleman, both on duty and away from the game."

In the event, 1996/1997 was to end without a trophy. Paul Merson departed for Middlesbrough, and new arrivals included Marc Overmars from Ajax and Gilles Grimandi and Emmanuel Petit, both from Wenger's former club, Monaco. The realisation of revived greatness was to emerge the following season, when the 'new' Arsenal would emulate the Cup and League Double of 1970/1971. "That was the best ever season for the Club, our first Double, and to equal that gave us all a special feeling – an exceptional, collective belief. In 1998, Petit, Bergkamp and Overmars were at the height of their game. We knew if we could keep a clean sheet, we could win any game. It was the same, only more so, when



we repeated it in 2001/2002. And when you achieve something like that, get so good, some of the press are always trying to knock it, to get at certain players or the manager, or perhaps trying to hammer players who are sent off, and that just serves to promote a mood of 'We'll show you'; it draws the team even closer together."

The first Double season of 1997/1998 saw the first serious spell of injury for Seaman, as he missed a lengthy period at the start of the new year and was replaced by Alex Manninger. But he returned on March 28, after missing six games, and played in the FA Cup semi-final and Final against Wolverhampton Wanderers and Newcastle United respectively. The three seasons from 1999 to 2002 found Seaman plagued by injury. "Arsène consistently reminded me I was number one, however, even when Alex or Richard Wright needed to come in as replacement, or would be selected for the cup rounds to give me a break. They would never play in the League if I was fit. In 2000/2001, I had a serious problem with my right shoulder, and was really struggling. In the end I had an operation, and had some damaged bone removed. But I was in the side for the FA Cup Final against Liverpool, which was a most frustrating afternoon, when we had many, many chances and just didn't take them. Liverpool had three or four attacks and scored twice. We just couldn't believe how we had lost. For Michael Owen's first goal it was a bit of a scramble; for his second I got a hand to it, but it was not enough."

No player likes to admit decline, but there were those who detected that, in this painful moment of defeat for Arsenal, Seaman was showing signs, at 38, of receding from his peak. Nonetheless the repeat of the Double the following season was a magnificent revival for the Club, even if Seaman's involvement was only partial. He made 17 appearances alongside Wright's 12 and Stuart Taylor's nine. "To beat Chelsea, to do the Double for the second time, was just great, to take me personally past Bob [Wilson] and to be able to say: 'Yeah, Bob, how about the double Double?'"

Seaman's form was still good enough to convince Sven-Göran Eriksson that he remained the best goalkeeper for England as they headed off for Japan/Korea for the 2002 World Cup Finals – and that notorious Ronaldinho free kick. "With great technicians like Ronaldinho, they're trying to hit certain areas with the free kick, and the ball comes off the foot at different angles. I've been told he didn't mean it, but at the end of the day it still went in. You never forget it. It will be there for the rest of my life. Afterwards, I didn't even know if I wanted to carry on playing football. I felt that bad. You reflect: 'Is it worth it after all you've done?'. But as a goalkeeper you have to balance great saves against great errors. The following season, against Sheffield United in the semi-final of the FA Cup, I

made, at 39, possibly my best save ever, where I scooped onehanded off the line a header by Paul Peschisolido when we were leading 1-0 with 10 minutes to go."

It would prove to be Seaman's final season at Highbury. During that time, he was to make his 75th and final international appearance, in a European qualifier against Macedonia at Southampton. Once more he was a source of controversy when beaten by Artim Sakiri direct from a corner kick. "I was nearly 40, I talked to Arsène; he was still happy with the way I was playing for Arsenal. Even though bothered by injury, I was able to make 28 appearances, and we finished second in the Premiership to Manchester United. Once again, we reached the FA Cup Final [2003], against Southampton, and I'll never forget that, being captain for the day because Patrick [Vieira] couldn't play. At the time I didn't know it would be my last game, though I'd taken a lot of stick during the season on account of the World Cup. So winning, with Robert Pires scoring the winner, gave me a lot of pleasure."

Having been given a one-year extended contract from 2002, Seaman was now told by Wenger that he wanted someone whose fitness was reliable, and gave him the chance of combining being number three goalkeeper and becoming goalkeeping coach. "The offer I got after the Cup Final was going to mean a 75 per cent drop in wages, but the money side wasn't the only problem. I wanted to keep on playing, and I didn't want to be a number three. I'd been in the game a long time, I'd enough money put by not to have to work, but I wanted to carry on. It was upsetting; it always is when you're told you're not wanted as number one. But Arsène was gentlemanly, so it wasn't a difficult conversation. I told him Manchester City wanted me and he accepted my decision. I'd had 13 fantastic years at Highbury."

In the event, the journey north at the start of the 2003/2004 season would prove abortive, with continuing fitness problems resulting in Seaman's retirement in January 2004. Did he have any regrets? "I'd done just about everything possible. I'd enjoyed a great lifestyle, and my achievements in football made me feel really proud. I'd had so many good times, I couldn't pick on a particular best. I'd been so lucky. Yes, I'd like to have won something with England, that's my only disappointment, but there's really nothing I would want to change."

**David Miller**

# ‘One-Nil to the Arsenal...’

Half-time at the Parc Des Princes: it's the first leg of the European Cup Winners' Cup semi-final and we have got our noses in front against Paris St Germain. A glancing Ian Wright header separates the sides. Both sets of supporters start to mull over the first 45 minutes as the PA system cranks into action, blaring out the hits of the day. When 'Go West' by the Pet Shop Boys hits the turntable, the happy Arsenal contingent tucked in one corner start singing along, instinctively ad-libbing some lyrics of their own. "One-Nil to the Ar-sen-al, One-Nil to the Ar-sen-al." That's where it began: March 29, 1994. This jubilant anthem would become the catchy soundtrack of a victorious European campaign that climaxed in Copenhagen just over a month later.

Though that encounter in Paris finished 1-1, we went on to win the return at Highbury by a single goal, as we did the final when a classy Parma side were somehow thwarted by a brilliant rearguard action after a long-range effort by yours truly had nudged us ahead. As we celebrated down on the pitch that night, a Parken Stadium clad almost entirely in red and white swayed repeatedly to a tune that paid homage to the side's resilience and fortitude, qualities instilled in the players by the demanding George Graham. One-Nil to the Arsenal – it tasted incredibly sweet, though we had never set out to win matches this way, to eke out victory by the narrowest of margins. That wasn't part of the gameplan. Yes, we would take it, if offered, but everyone inside the camp would have much preferred to win by a more comfortable scoreline. Nevertheless, our defence at the time had reached its very peak. Having been together for six years, a back four of Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn knew each other's games so intimately that the level of understanding and organisation was second to none.

If you were clever enough, what's more, to slip past these eagle-eyed sentries, the imperious David Seaman was always waiting to spoil the best-laid plans. It really was a magnificent unit, unrivalled for obduracy before or since. Clean sheets, to them, had become second nature. That's why a weakened line-up in Copenhagen – minus the suspended Wright and the injured Martin Keown and John Jensen – stood a great chance of lifting the cup, especially when the

side's centre-forward found the back of the net after 19 minutes. In truth, Dixon's hopeful ball into the box should have been easily dealt with by Parma's normally reliable defence, but when Lorenzo Minotti's weak overhead kick headed straight for me, a half-chance opened up. With three defenders converging 20 yards out, my chest down and left-footed volley (the kind of skill we would practise countless times on the training ground) looped promisingly towards the right-hand corner.

Yet it was only after their goalkeeper, Luca Bucci, had dived and landed on the floor that I could see where the ball had actually ended up. There it sat, nestling in the opposite corner having struck the inside of the right-hand post. Wheeling away in triumph, the goalscorer let his emotions run wild. On a personal level, this amounted to quite a heady moment for someone far from happy with the way his career had developed. For the first time ever, the goals had dried up over those past couple of years. Not enjoying my football, feeling stale and lethargic, it looked as if a move away from Highbury would be best for all concerned.

Any misgivings, however, were temporarily forgotten in a euphoric dressing room afterwards. Sipping champagne with my mates, the cup down by my feet, I could reflect on a match when everything went right. Every ball stuck in Copenhagen that night. No matter how closely tracked by some streetwise Italian defenders, I had managed to retain possession and move the ball on.

As a professional, that is immensely satisfying – to respond in the big games when the pressure is on, to save your best form for when it really matters. It brought back vivid memories of Anfield in 1989 when we had beaten Liverpool 2-0 to clinch the League title. That night, too, turned out pretty well.

Come the end of their careers, strikers are defined by their goals. Thankfully, joyously, I had managed to notch up strikes in two of the biggest games in Arsenal's history. In amongst all the hoo-ha, that pleasing realisation dawned as I took off my boots. "I knew it Smudge," said the beaming Jensen, leaning on crutches after a serious knee injury. "I knew we'd win 1-0 and that you would score." He wasn't kidding either. My wife later confirmed that John had said the same thing to her just before kick-off. JJ – what a guy, a real gem, but I never had him marked down as a talented psychic...

Looking back, mind, the scoreline shouldn't have come as a total surprise – at least not the 'nil' part. Our Danish midfielder knew, as did all his team-mates, that we didn't tend to relinquish 1-0 leads. Though the side wasn't properly equipped to win league titles at the time, it was still a mightily stubborn beast with a nasty bite, perfectly suited to cup competitions.

That's how the 'One-Nil' song came about. That's how it became part of

Arsenal folklore several decades after George Allison famously made reference to this particular scoreline. "It's 1-0 to the Arsenal. That's the way we like it." The manager of Arsenal's 1938 Championship-winning team had come up with this line in *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery*, a murder whodunnit featuring his squad. Many years later, those punters in Paris unwittingly fell in line with Allison, extending a theme that enjoyed its heyday in wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen.

For the goalscorer that night, the victory would form a major bullet point in his Arsenal career.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **The fab four**

**Striker Alan Smith watched Arsenal's legendary Back Four in action from the other end of the pitch. Here, he chews over old times with Messrs Dixon, Adams, Bould and Winterburn**

Arsenal's Back Four: an enduring phenomenon that stayed stubbornly intact for 11 memorable years, defying the fickle tides of form and opinion to provide an unbending backbone for three Arsenal managers. Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn – it is difficult to imagine four players more in tune with each other, more committed to ensuring the job was done right. It was about professional pride. Clean sheets to them meant more than scoring goals. Shut-outs were their currency; it was how they were judged, and the history books show they earned every plaudit they received. In fact, no other rearguard in living memory has consistently hit the same heights as this dedicated crew.

Much of the credit must go to their first manager at Arsenal, George Graham, who set about skilfully assembling the quartet, recruiting Winterburn, Dixon and Bould, before working relentlessly on understanding and organisation in the following months. Two titles swiftly followed as reward, the second involving one solitary defeat and a meagre 18 goals conceded. With the medals piling up, their reputation spread, comfortably crossing the English Channel into mainland Europe when the 1994 European Cup Winners' Cup was won.

But still they weren't done. Upon Arsène Wenger's arrival, when many people anticipated a parting of the ways, the fab four kicked on, their intelligence and ability somewhat surprising the Frenchman. That period, in a way, proved this group's greatest achievement. Wenger's discerning head had been comprehensibly turned. He came to see far beyond the uncompromising Anglo-Saxon angle, realising he had inherited four characters of extraordinary calibre. In shoring up Arsenal's defences over this period, other players, it must be said, played major parts, most notably Martin Keown who came into the equation in the mid-1990s. Neither should we forget the example and advice of the long-serving David O'Leary, as well as intermittent contributions from the likes of Andy Linighan and Gilles Grimandi, not to mention John Lukic and David Seaman, two top-class goalkeepers.

Yet there is something about the original Back Four that is hard to deny, due in part to an amazing longevity which demanded deep reserves of determination and talent. Seeing those names on the teamsheet created a warm feeling inside. With this four in place, Arsenal fans turned up for matches feeling reassured. By the time of its break-up in 1999 (when Bould's departure for Sunderland



signalled the dawn of a new era), this unit had become an institution at Highbury, revered and loved for its loyal service. In all probability, there will never be another unit like it. For this old team-mate, then, getting them together for lunch was a great privilege...

**Smith** OK, boys, let's start at the beginning. What are your memories of first coming together?

**Dixon** The first game we played was at Wimbledon on the first day of the 1988/1989 Championship-winning season. We won 5-1 at Plough Lane.

**Bould** How could I forget that day? It was my debut for Arsenal and from their very first free kick I lost John Fashanu at the far post and he crept in behind to score with a header. Not a great start. There must have been thousands of Arsenal fans behind the goal thinking: "Who the hell is this lanky idiot we've just signed?"

**Dixon** I've got news for you. There were another 10 of us on the pitch saying the same thing!

**Smith** So what about those early days getting to know each other on the training ground. There have been all sorts of stories regarding George Graham's methods. What exactly did he do?

**Winterburn** Bored the pants off us, that's what! All that repetition, day in and day out. We would come in every morning and know exactly what we were going to be doing – attack against defence, shadow play, one-on-ones. Yes, it could be boring, but at the same time you knew it was doing some good. You could feel an understanding developing so in that way it was actually quite enjoyable.

**Adams** People have said that George used to string a long rope across the pitch to keep us all in position, but that was a myth. He did talk about a rope, but that was only because he wanted us to imagine being linked together. It was his way of helping us to work as a unit, not individuals.

**Winterburn** He'd also stand there holding out his arms and say how his hands represented the two full-backs and his shoulders the centre-halves. Whenever one moved, so did all the rest. He'd also run across the line holding the ball so that we had to adjust our positions. I remember one day it all got a bit much. He had a go at me, I had a go back and I walked off in a huff. "Yeah, yeah, that's it," he said. "Go on, go and sulk in the toilet!"

**Bould** He also used to put on a session when it was three forwards against the back four. Why he used three I don't know but there'd be you, Smudge, Merse [Paul Merson] and maybe Grovesy [Perry Groves] closing us down. It

was really hard work.

**Adams** He wanted the whole team to work incredibly hard. He always used to mention Ian Rush and Kenny Dalglish at Liverpool and the way they worked. He thought if you forwards worked hard enough across the line, stopped the full-backs from clearing it, us defenders would be able to play till we were 40. That was his favourite saying.

**Smith** Yeah, that's why I retired through injury at 32 – trying to protect you lot!

**Winterburn** Can you imagine putting those kind of sessions on now? A lot of players just wouldn't stand for it. I remember one exercise where I had to run with the ball from the goalline to the halfway line, leave the ball there, count to 10 and then try to defend the goal on my own against four of the lads. It was a recovery drill.

**Bould** What about when George came back one summer and wanted us to defend like Wimbledon?

**Dixon** Oh yeah, I remember that now. In one game against them we kept getting caught offside. I would whip in a cross and the Wimbledon defenders would all rush out on cue and catch loads of us offside. George loved that.

**Bould** We tried it a few times in training, but after a bit I seem to remember you having a quiet word, Tone.

**Adams** I'd like to think he was actually copying AC Milan at the time more than Wimbledon. At Milan, Franco Baresi would give the signal and they'd all sprint out. I thought it was suicidal, but it did work. You would probably get caught out four or five times in a season, but the rest of the time it could be a useful tactic.

**Dixon** Don't you remember, we saw it for ourselves one year in the Makita tournament at Wembley. We were watching one of Milan's games from the stand and every time the ball was played back and then crossed into the box, the Milan defenders would all rush out.

**Bould** Actually, you couldn't do that now because of the offside rule. You'd be too vulnerable. But on the subject of rushing out, people always used to say that we were masters at springing the offside trap but we were never taught to play offside and we never set out to do it.

**Dixon** That's right. In 10 years I don't think I ever rushed up with my hand in the air appealing. All we did was hold our line and let the stupid forwards run offside.

**Adams** I blame *The Full Monty*, me! All that hand up in the air stuff.

**Smith** So did that get on your nerves, the fact that people got the wrong idea about how you defended?

**Winterburn** Yes. Some people, I think, didn't really understand how we worked. It wasn't about catching opponents offside, it was about keeping our line and being hard to break down.

**Bould** Our line most of the time was the 18-yard box, wasn't it? George didn't want us to drop any further back than that if we could possibly help it.

**Smith** Apart from Tony, you were all recruited by George. Was it hard at the start, adjusting to his demands?

**Dixon** When I came from Stoke City it was all really weird because the boss wanted us to show attackers inside when they had the ball; guide them towards our two centre-halves. I'd never done that before. It meant going on to my weaker foot. Ideally, I wanted to tackle with my right foot, not my left. All this coaching took some getting used to because at Stoke I'd played under Mick Mills, who'd played in defence loads of times for England but not once did he do any back four work.

**Winterburn** It was the same for me coming from Wimbledon. There, we'd never worked specifically on what you should do when someone's coming at you with the ball. You were just expected to stop them, take a touch and smash it upfield.

**Bould** I was the same. I never did any tactical or functional work whatsoever at Stoke. It wasn't like that. You'd just play five-a-sides, go in the gym, do a few weights. That was how it was back then. Everyone did that.

**Adams** Actually, there's something I've always wanted to ask you, Nige. Was there someone you knew in the West Stand at Highbury because every time we scored you'd run up and down that side waving like a madman.

**Winterburn** No, there wasn't. I was just letting my aggression out. Doing my psycho bit!

**Adams** It must have been strange for you coming from Wimbledon to Arsenal?

**Winterburn** To be honest, I think I was overawed to start with. You know what it's like, I met George in his office upstairs at Highbury.

**Bould** That's right, where he had the biggest seat in the world and would put us in a little chair on the other side of the desk where he could look down at us!

**Winterburn** The hardest part for me was coming here and then playing for the reserves. I wasn't used to that. Even though Wimbledon only used to get 6,000 crowds, at least there was an atmosphere. Then suddenly I'm going out and playing to empty stands. There was no buzz. I had to do that for six months. When I signed, the gaffer had said that I'd have to wait for my opportunity because Kenny [Sansom] was still there. After that it was up to me. I made my debut at Portsmouth on New Year's Day, 1988. I played left-back that day but

had to play right-back quite a few times during the rest of that season.

**Smith** What was that like for someone so one-footed?

**Winterburn** In a way it was OK because I'd show my man inside onto my left foot. The problem came when I had to play the ball up the line with my right.

**Adams** Talking of all this showing people the inside business, do you remember when Manchester United beat us 6-2 in the League Cup? Lee Sharpe kept coming inside and scoring. Our system looked pretty hopeless that night.

**Bould** I'll tell you who else used to cause us all sorts of problems – John Barnes. How many times did he score against us by ducking inside and playing a one-two? Brilliant at it, he was.

**Adams** My one principle in all this is that you can never push up if your full-backs are going to show their wingers down the line. If that happens, central defenders have got to follow their men if they make a run. The only way you can get up the pitch is by the full-backs showing the inside.

**Bould** I think George borrowed a lot of his ideas from Arrigo Sacchi, the Italian coach. Terry Venables was a big influence as well.

**Dixon** To be fair, doesn't every coach steal ideas?

**Adams** That's right. The best coaches are thieves. It's actually a compliment.

**Smith** But for all George's coaching, his success was dependent on you four being able to carry out his orders.

**Adams** That's right. If just one of us couldn't have grasped, on an intellectual level, what we were trying to do, it would have all broken down.

**Bould** They'd have just bought someone else!

**Smith** Talking of which, what about when Andy Linighan arrived from Norwich, Bouldy. Did you see that as a threat?

**Bould** Yeah, of course I did. He'd arrived for big money. I think George had originally bought Andy with the idea of replacing me, but then I went on to play my best football over those next few years.

**Smith** When Tony went away for his little holiday [his three-month prison spell in 1990], Andy came in and you could hardly see the join because the other three lads knew their jobs inside out. They could accommodate Andy virtually without thinking. Is that fair?

**Dixon** Yes it is. There was a system in place. I thought it was easy for people coming in. It was actually quite hard to stray out of position because the rest of us were so organised.

**Smith** So could any old coach do what George did? Produce a back four like we had at Arsenal and make it last for so long?

**Adams** Well, you've got to be able to put the sessions on. Not everyone can

do that.

**Bould** I don't think it will happen. And do you know why? Rotation. Players don't play together regularly enough. Teams very rarely have a settled back four these days.

**Winterburn** And lads don't play with injuries so much either.

**Dixon** I can hold my hand up now and say that I very rarely played without feeling some kind of a knock or other. It must have been about one game in 10 when I felt completely OK, without any niggles.

**Bould** I could always feel something because I was taking anti-inflammatory tablets every day for years for arthritis in my toes.

**Dixon** For me the key to it all was the fear factor. When I first came, if the boss had told me to jump through hoops, I'd have done it. I was at an age when I was completely receptive to new ideas. I was like a blank sheet of canvas, wanting someone to teach me. I thought George was God because he'd brought me to one of the biggest clubs in the country. All of a sudden I'm playing next to you, Tone, and you're listening to him, so I'm thinking the gaffer must know what he's doing.

**Smith** There was definitely an aura about George and a line you didn't cross. He was the boss and that was it. Do you remember when we went to Spain one year and jumped on stage in a bar? They were playing *Stand By Me* so we started singing "Georgie, Georgie stand by me..." At that point the gaffer happened to walk in. He took one look and turned around pretty sharpish.

**Winterburn** Socialising with the players was definitely not his thing. He liked to keep his distance and always used to tell us which nightclubs to stay clear of because he wanted to save the best ones for himself!

**Bould** But in answer to your question Smudge, I don't think just anybody could do what George did nowadays because you've got to have the right players. I'm not trying to blow our own trumpets or anything here, but you've got to get a particular type of footballer for it to all work. You've got to be fairly intelligent for a start.

**Dixon** Wenger said that when he came, didn't he? He was surprised how good we were as footballers and how intelligent we were. He'd thought we were like robots just doing what we were told. So when he tried to expand our game and let us go out and express ourselves and we were able to do it, he was surprised. I mean, when he first came he was going to let us all go.

**Bould** That's right. He left us alone during that first season because he only arrived in the September, but I think he imagined he was going to have to replace us the following summer.

**Smith** I had retired by this time, but I remember Wenger being very fair

when it came to looking after you all financially.

**Winterburn** Yes, he made sure we got sorted out on the wages front. He didn't think it was right that our wages were so much less than some of the other boys. He wanted to bring us up to the second tier behind the likes of you Rodders [Tony], Dennis [Bergkamp] and Platty [David Platt]. He called us in to sign new contracts which was great but then I remember you going back in, Rodders, to sign another deal. I went back in the next week because the difference in money had been increased again. Arsène said: "You're right. I can't give you another rise now but I will at the end of the year." And he did. He was true to his word.

**Bould** He was very good like that. He recognised what we were bringing to the team, how important we were, and felt it only fair that we should be rewarded.

**Smith** What else was Wenger good at? I mean, the difference between him, and George and Bruce Rioch, two strict disciplinarians, must have seemed huge for you lot.

**Dixon** There's one story that I always tell when it comes to trying to sum up Arsène. It was one of his first games in charge and he came into the dressing room at half-time – I don't know what the score was, but we hadn't played well – and he didn't say anything, just went to the chalk board and drew a couple of crosses and an arrow. Just as we were about to go out for the second half he pointed to the board and said: "You do this, you do this," before clapping his hands, shouting "Come on!" and walking out. We all looked at each other in amazement. We ended up winning 3-1 and Arsène came in after and said: "Yes, I told you!" To me, that sums him up as a manager on a matchday. He has never, ever said anything to me at half-time or full-time that's made me think, "Blimey, this bloke knows his stuff". He hasn't had to. He gets results in other ways.

**Adams** Physiology. That's what I put it all down to. There's no one better at preparing players physically, knowing what they need to be at the peak of fitness.

**Smith** And that knowledge prolonged all your careers, didn't it?

**Bould** Definitely. I felt so much fitter under Wenger. I wasn't injured so much. I felt a lot more supple. We would never have lasted so long without his special methods.

**Smith** So if you had to pick one season from over the years, which was your finest? When were you at your very peak?

**Dixon** We haven't had it yet!

**Adams** I think the 1990/1991 season was probably the best, when we only conceded 18 goals and should have done the Double. Don't forget I spent three

months that season in Chelmsford nick and you boys did OK without me.

**Dixon** No, I think you'll find we actually did better without you!

**Bould** Remember Tottenham Hotspur away? We got absolutely murdered that day. We would have lost 5-0 if it hadn't been for Dave Seaman. Let's be honest about the Back Four, the keeper was a major part of it. Dave was a top, top keeper For those first four years after he came [in 1990] I thought he was absolutely outstanding.

**Smith** What about John Lukic? How did he differ from Dave in terms of how you worked together?

**Winterburn** Lukey was a great keeper, too. A fantastic shot stopper with brilliant reactions, but if I had to choose between them I'd probably go for Dave. He had everything.

**Dixon** The thing with keepers as well is that the less you know they're there, the better it is. Whenever a ball went over our heads, we knew Dave would deal with it. It got to the stage where you almost disregarded the danger. Sorted, you thought. That's a fantastic advantage.

**Smith** Your best season aside, was the European Cup Winners' Cup Final in 1994 your finest hour as a group?

**Winterburn** That game against Parma was an amazing feat because it was like the Alamo for most of the match.

**Bould** Do you remember walking past their players on the pitch the night before? We'd just finished training and they were coming on. They looked at us like we were a bunch of no-hopers.

**Dixon** There was the winners' podium thing as well. We noticed that Parma's name and colours had already been put on.

**Bould** Yeah, but we didn't know at the time that the other side had been decked out in red and white because they were going to turn the podium around according to who won. Mind you, it helped that we didn't know all that. It got us really worked up thinking no one was giving us a chance. We had the raving needle.

**Dixon** We've had some brilliant support from our fans down the years, but I think that night in Copenhagen topped the lot. There were flags everywhere. We virtually took over the stadium. But I'll never forget when Nigel decides to go down injured right in front of their fans. Me and Gary Lewin were getting pelted with all sorts. I was going: "Nige, get up for God's sake!"

**Winterburn** I was just having a rest. But that was some game, wasn't it? We did unbelievably well to win against the likes of [Gianfranco] Zola, [Tomas] Brodin and [Faustino] Asprilla. I can't remember us getting out of our own half. Your goal, Smudge, seemed to be about the only shot we had.

**Dixon** I remember one of the lads shouting for me to hit the corner flag. I wouldn't have minded but there was still half an hour to go! We played a 4-3-3 system. I remember telling Kevin Campbell, who was playing on the right side of attack, just to make sure that he got back in front of me whenever they got the ball. "Where are you going?" I was shouting. "Never mind all that attacking stuff. Just make sure you protect me!"

**Adams** I think AC Milan were the only team who could compare with us at the time. To me, it felt as if we were invincible. Nothing was ever going to get past.

**Smith** Maybe England should have used you a lot more as a unit; just put you all in together.

**Dixon** The closest we got was a line-up of Dixon, Adams, [Martin] Keown, with Winterburn on the bench.

**Winterburn** That was under Howard Wilkinson, wasn't it? I don't think there was ever a stage when it looked like all four of us would play for England together even though I remember some of the papers calling for it.

**Dixon** Howard brought me back into the squad after five years out. I played against France at Wembley and that was my last cap.

**Smith** Thinking about it, it must be quite a shock to the system to leave that cosy environment at Arsenal where everyone's in tune with each other to join up for an international or even join another club where, all of a sudden, your teammates aren't on quite the same wavelength.

**Bould** It is different, yes. I went to Sunderland and they had totally different ideas about the mechanics of defending. It was hard to adjust. It's actually a skill in itself having the intelligence to defend. Some people just aren't born with the nose for sniffing out danger.

**Dixon** Yes, I'm not sure you can teach someone that. You can tell them where to stand on the pitch, get them in the right position at the right time, but they still might not react quickly enough when something happens.

**Adams** Do you think Arsène Wenger could have done what George did? Is he the type of coach who could assemble a back four and work on it like George did?

**Winterburn** Probably not. Arsène isn't like that. He doesn't really coach in that sense of the word. In many ways, George was the right man in the right place at the right time.

**Dixon** Here's a question. If you had one year left of your career, who would you rather play for – Arsène or George? Personally, if I wanted someone to teach me my job, to coach me on the training ground, I'd go for George all day long because Arsène doesn't do that. But if I could pick someone to play for during



my last season I'd go for Arsène every time.

**Smith** So was it more enjoyable under Arsène?

**Winterburn** Well, you were allowed to do what you wanted in many ways. There weren't any restrictions. He left it up to us whether we went forward or not. He trusted our judgment.

**Dixon** But I tell you what, it was only more enjoyable because George had educated us by that stage. With such a good grounding, we instinctively knew what was right and what was wrong.

**Bould** So what's the definition of learning? Because Wenger has totally different ideas from most people. He doesn't put on a training session and go: "No, stop. You go there, you go there and you go there." He doesn't do that. He lets a session run and run and when things go wrong he waits to see if you can work it out for yourself. If you can do that, he'll be happy.

**Winterburn** In a way he's just a better version of Harry Redknapp. Because that's all Harry does. He brings players in and if they're not good enough he takes them out again. Player after player after player. He doesn't coach as such.

**Smith** I suppose it's wrong anyway for me to ask you to compare George with Arsène or even Bruce Rioch. Over the course of 11 years you had become different people.

**Bould** It is impossible to compare different eras. We did what we were told to do under George because we were playing for our next contracts. That doesn't apply now. Players get their money very quickly so after that you've got to handle them differently.

**Adams** I was a young kid under George. There was no way I was going to stand up to him off the pitch. I was just as scared as you lot because I was worried about my own contract.

**Dixon** Money always came into it for our generation. By rights I should have packed up a lot earlier than I did because of my ankle and knee, but I kept going till I was 38 because the money was too good to turn down. I'm suffering for it now, mind.

**Smith** Even so, you must all feel immensely proud of what you achieved. No Arsenal fan will ever forget the famous Back Four.

**Dixon** It's funny, you know. When it was all going on, when we were winning trophies all over the place, I didn't get any sense of how good we were. That only came when it was all over, when we started to wane. When you've got something that works so well, you can take it for granted. It was hard work but in another way it was also very easy. Mentally there wasn't any stress. We'd go out and know exactly what we were doing. Physically it was hard, but it wasn't until it all started to fall apart near the end that people started to talk about the

Back Four. I can't remember people talking about us much in the middle of it all. "Oh yeah, weren't they great in '94?" There was none of that.

**Bould** No, back then it was all about "One-Nil to the Arsenal". It was only really when Wenger came that we started getting all the credit.

**Adams** For it all to come together, you've got to create the environment. Arsenal was a great platform. George got four good players together who all wanted to learn and he worked us very hard. At the same time, he was desperate to make a name for himself as a top manager. As a result, the chemistry was perfect.

And with that, four old team-mates went their separate ways once more, disappearing into the London bustle as quickly as they had arrived. Whatever they do in their lives from here on, their names will forever be linked with what they achieved together during one glorious period in the Club's history. The Arsenal Back Four: a now legendary entity. The bond is as unbreakable as it is unspoken.

**Alan Smith**

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## **A little local affair**

The fierce rivalry between Arsenal and Spurs dates back to the 19th century, and it has been raging ever since – never more so than during the dramatic final season at Highbury

# The rivalry with Spurs

## 1880-1890

A North London rivalry which was to extend, in varying degrees, over the next century first took root in the 1880s. That was when football began to blossom, some 20 years after the foundation of the Football Association. As the game began to spread from an initial monopoly by the public schools and Oxford and Cambridge to the working classes in northern cities, Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur broke the mould by establishing themselves as prominent clubs in the south (though prominence was certainly not the early trademark of Arsenal).

The Club began its existence as Dial Square, a part of the Government's munitions factory at Woolwich. It subsequently became Royal Arsenal, then Woolwich Arsenal, The Arsenal and eventually Arsenal. However, it was Tottenham Hotspur who, so to speak, got their foot in the door first, by a matter of four years.

Hotspur FC, as they were initially known, staged their early games on Tottenham Marshes, and 19 years later they would become the first southern professional club to win the FA Cup, in 1901. Woolwich Arsenal were the first southern club to win the Football League Championship, 30 years later, having been the first to make their mark in the League with their election to the Second Division in 1893. Spurs would not gain entry for another 15 seasons, by which time Arsenal had won promotion to the First Division.

Arsenal's foundation characterised that deep-seated energy, ambition and wilfulness of the working man to build a better life for himself and his family. Jack Humble was such a one. Born in East Hartborn in County Durham in 1862, his parents died within three months of each other in 1880, and he and his older brother decided to quit the depressed North-East in search of their fortune. Unable to afford the train fare, they walked from Durham to London, finding employment as engine fitters at Woolwich.

Humble remained connected with the Club for four decades, being one of the

founding fathers, together with friends David Danskin, Elijah Watkins and Richard Pearce. Dial Square was one of a number of teams at the factory, and their first recorded match was against Eastern Wanderers in December 1886 – never mind the lack of a formal name, a pitch, or any kit, 15 men paying six old pence to fund the Club. That opening match was played on the Isle of Dogs near an open sewer; the resulting 6-0 win was celebrated on Christmas Day at the Royal Oak, adjacent to the railway station, and the grand title of "Royal Arsenal" was assumed.

The name Hotspur derived from that attributed to Sir Henry Percy for his courage on the field of battle in the 14th century. Sir Henry was the son of the first Earl of Northumberland, whose family had subsequently developed the 19th-century housing estates in North London surrounding the football club's future home at White Hart Lane. Percy House was the name of the YMCA building in Tottenham Hotspur, which would be the club's headquarters in their early years. Formed by a group of cricketers, Hotspur FC took shape in September 1883, following a series of scratch games the previous winter, and the first formal fixture – against Brownlow Rovers – brought victory by nine goals to nil. Local meetings with Latimer from Edmonton foreshadowed the later rivalry with Arsenal, with the *Tottenham Herald* reporting on spectators' language which was "often coarsely personal in their remarks".

Their first competitive fixture came in October 1885, with an attendance of 400 on Tottenham Marshes to see St Albans defeated 4-2 in the London Association Cup. In the next round Hotspur lost 8-0 to Casuals, forerunners of the legendary Corinthians.

Arsenal's adoption of red as the colour of their shirts arose only because two of their players already possessed shirts of that colour from previously playing for Nottingham Forest. In 1887, Royal Arsenal held their first match against neighbouring Erith on Plumstead Common. And in November that year came the first confrontation with Tottenham Hotspur, staged away on the Marshes. Arsenal arrived late, so the game lasted only 75 minutes, with Arsenal losing 2-1. Only the agility of Fred Beardsley in goal prevented the margin of Spurs' victory being wider. Two seasons later, Royal Arsenal entered the FA Cup for the first time, and they reached the semi-final of the London Senior Cup.

## **1890-1900**

At the annual general meeting in 1891, Humble proposed that, besides changing the name to Woolwich Arsenal, the Club should turn professional, which brought

condemnation from the rigidly amateur London FA, who banned Arsenal from all competitions other than the FA Cup. The following spring, Woolwich Arsenal joined 11 others in attempting to create a southern rival to the Football League – Tottenham Hotspur failing to gain inclusion. Challenged by the London FA, all but Arsenal backed down. However, at the end of the 1892/1893 season the Football League extended their Second Division from 12 to 15 clubs, bringing in Liverpool, Newcastle United and Arsenal – three clubs that were to have a massive impact on the Championship over the next century. Meanwhile, Spurs were improving their ground and attracting far larger attendances than Arsenal, who were now playing at Manor Field, but experiencing serious financial difficulties due to their geographical location south of the river.

Tottenham Hotspur, dominant in the Southern Alliance League, were paying only a nominal ground rent of £17 a year and, in 1893, entered the newly created FA Amateur Cup. This appeared to be a viable alternative to the professional takeover in the north, but in 1895 Spurs took the plunge and decided also to turn professional, encouraged by a 3-1 win over Arsenal at their own ground. In 1896, Tottenham Hotspur bypassed the Southern League's Second Division to gain a place in the First, finishing fourth and then third in their first two seasons. Arsenal, meanwhile, dropped to their lowest Football League position so far, 10th, in 1896/1897 but recovered over the next two seasons. Their North London rivals were stealing a march by the enlistment of many players north of the border and in 1898 became a limited company. On Good Friday, Arsenal visited Spurs's Northumberland Park for a friendly, and a 14,000 crowd watched a goalless draw. That season, Tottenham Hotspur scored over 200 goals in 68 matches, suffering only four defeats in winning the Southern League. Arsenal might have been in the senior league, but rivalry as to who was the top club in the south was seriously debated in North London.

## **1900-1910**

This rivalry was further emphasised the following season, with Spurs, as they had become known, winning the FA Cup while Arsenal languished in the Second Division, scoring only 39 times. Envious eyes were cast northwards from Plumstead especially when, in 1901/1902, there were gate receipts of £1,500 at White Hart Lane when Spurs began their defence of the Cup against Southampton – although they lost after two replays. Still overshadowing Arsenal, they climbed to second place in the Southern League, their attack now enhanced by the arrival of Vivian Woodward, a celebrated amateur centre-

forward who played 24 times for the full England team, an exceptional achievement still possible in the early part of the 20th century.

In the face of such competition within London, Arsenal also ventured into the transfer market, strengthening the team that would gain promotion four years later through the signing of Jimmy Jackson, a centre-half distinguished for his defending rather than the then-conventional role of freely roaming attacker. Also moving to the Club was Jimmy Ashcroft, from the Kent coast club Sheppey, who became the Club's first player to be capped by England, in 1905/1906. Jackson's influence immediately helped the team to climb to fourth place in 1901/1902, with only 26 goals conceded in 34 League matches. Promotion came two seasons later, with the team undefeated at home and averaging a point from every away game. They finished second to Preston North End though, not to be outdone, Spurs were runners-up in the Southern League.

Here lay dilemmas for both clubs. For Arsenal, where to play to provide enlarged spectator capacity? For Spurs, where to look for a higher-status competition? In performance terms, Arsenal, twice FA Cup semi-finalists, were London's senior club, but they were far from the best supported because of the inaccessibility of Manor Field. This embarrassment mounted with the promotion of Spurs to the Second Division in 1908/1909. Indeed, in their first season Spurs were involved in the promotion race throughout, ultimately finishing second to Bolton. Now the London rivals were to meet head-on in the country's foremost competition.

On December 4, 1909 Spurs lost at Arsenal, by the only goal, scored early in the second half by Walter Lawrence. In the return in April, before a capacity crowd at White Hart Lane, Charles McGibbon gave Arsenal the lead, but after Roddy McEachrane went off injured, Spurs equalised. It was not a distinguished season for either club. Spurs needed a draw against Chelsea in their final match to avoid relegation, their 2-0 victory giving them 15th place, ahead of Arsenal, who were in the lowest safe position.

## **1910-1920**

Desperate to move to more attractive pastures north of the river, Arsenal chairman Henry Norris proposed ground sharing with Fulham at Craven Cottage, but this was rejected by the Football League. In 1913, Norris proposed the move which would intensify for all time that MontagueCapulet-style antagonism that lay at the heart of the challenge for prestige between the two London clubs. Discovering the availability of the St John's College of Divinity



site at Highbury, a mere three miles from White Hart Lane, Norris negotiated a 21-year lease for £20,000, with an agreement not to play at Highbury on Good Friday or Christmas Day.

Spurs, having just spent extensively on their own ground improvements, were incensed at the news but, despite their protests and those of neighbours Clapton Orient, the Football League ruled that North London's population was sufficient to cope with the proximity of two leading clubs. The current failure of both on the field – each were relegated prior to World War I – served to heighten the animosity.

There can be little doubt that Norris, newly knighted, held sway within the Football League's management: his private affiliation with John McKenna, the League president, was to result in what Spurs deemed a perfidious act at the re-opening of the League programme after the war. This was exacerbated by the fact that from 1910-1913, in the six League matches prior to hostilities, Spurs had scored 13 goals to Arsenal's seven, recording three victories to Arsenal's two.

For the first season after the Great War, 1919/1920, both First and Second Divisions were to be enlarged from 20 to 22 clubs. With Preston and Derby County due for promotion from the second division, it would have been logical for the bottom two clubs in the First Division, Spurs and Chelsea, to escape relegation. But Sir Henry contrived for an election to be staged for the promotion positions, in which Arsenal – who had finished fifth in the Second Division – polled 18 votes to eight for Spurs. Thus Tottenham Hotspur went down and Arsenal went up.

Spurs never forgave them, though they swiftly produced a response by gaining promotion at the end of the very next season and winning the FA Cup for the second time a year later.

## **1920-1930**

Now managed by Leslie Knighton, Arsenal may have had an undistinguished first season on their contrived return to the First Division, finishing 10th, but the following January there was an event, minor at the time, that would help to give them superiority over Tottenham Hotspur for much of the next 30 years: Arsenal signed wing-half Tom Whittaker. Though injury ended Whittaker's playing career prematurely five years later, he became a backroom mastermind.

Neither club flourished in the early 1920s – in 1924/1925, Arsenal escaped relegation by one place. The following year, irony of ironies, they were to

acquire as manager a former Spurs player, Herbert Chapman. Chapman had left Spurs in 1907 to lead Northampton Town to the Southern League Championship and then to guide Huddersfield Town to promotion in 1920, and subsequently to two successive League titles. However, his arrival at Highbury, in succession to Knighton, failed to bring immediate success. Through the early 1920s, Spurs might fairly be said to have been the more entertaining team. Their manager, Peter McWilliam, whose discreet manner was the very opposite of Chapman's, produced teams with a characteristic that would mark Spurs for much of the next 100 years: entertaining more often than effective.

The stars of their team at this time were Jimmy Seed, Arthur Grimsdell and Jimmy Dimmock, and these three contributed to numerous Spurs victories in the first six postwar seasons. From 1923 to 1925, Arsenal avoided relegation in spite of their points total never rising higher than the low 30s. The change, if initially unspectacular, came with Chapman's arrival and Arsenal's first appearance in the FA Cup Final, with a 1-0 defeat to Cardiff City in 1927. In spite of that loss, Arsenal beat Spurs 4-0 in a subsequent League match at White Hart Lane.

## **1930-1940**

The 1930s saw a decade of jubilation at Highbury and relative anonymity at White Hart Lane. Herbert Chapman's revolution reached fruition, first with a 2-0 FA Cup Final victory over Huddersfield in 1930 and the League title the following season, then the triple-title sequence from 1933–1935, Chapman's sad death notwithstanding. Spurs could only gaze down the Seven Sisters Road in a state of sustained envy. Briefly, after five years in the Second Division, they returned to the top flight for 1933/1934, their performances prospering with the arrival of Willie Hall, an outstanding inside-forward, and the cultured Arthur Rowe at centre-half. Both played in England's 4-1 victory over France at White Hart Lane, Hall becoming a distinguished partner for Stanley Matthews. Prosperity was brief, however. Though a record 68,000 crowd at Highbury had to swallow a 3-1 defeat to Spurs in January 1934, the following season the rivals' two encounters brought 11 goals for Arsenal, and down again went Tottenham Hotspur to the Second Division, where they would remain for the next 15 years.

In October 1934, Rowe couldn't handle the rumbustious Ted Drake, who hit a hat-trick, and in March, without Rowe, Hall and Willie Evans, Spurs suffered their heaviest home defeat in 70 League meetings with Arsenal – 6-0, with Drake and Alf Kirchen each scoring twice. Arsenal continued their triumphant ways, while becalmed Spurs quietly began to rebuild with the players who

would revive the club post-war: Ted Ditchburn, Les Bennett, Ronnie Burgess, Bill Nicholson, Les Medley and Vic Buckingham.

## **1940-1950**

Whatever antagonisms and ripostes might occur over the years on and off the field, wartime found the two clubs holding hands. With Highbury requisitioned as an Air Raid Precaution centre in blitzed North London, the reduced programme of matches for both clubs was staged at White Hart Lane, with attendances restricted to 22,000. The occasion with most prestige came at the time of Allied victory, and was Arsenal's: a meeting in November 1945 with Moscow Dynamo during the Russian side's goodwill tour. They had just defeated Cardiff 10-1, and with only Bernard Joy, Laurie Scott and Cliff Bastin available among famous names, Arsenal's 11 was reinforced by the likes of Stanley Matthews of Stoke City, the Fulham pair of Joe Bacuzzi and Ronnie Rooke, and Stan Mortensen of Blackpool.

The crowd of 54,640 and indeed the referee, a Russian, enjoyed only an occasional view of the game, however, as it was played in thick fog, which lifted intermittently. Rooke and Mortensen (two) scored after Dynamo had led. It was 3-2 at half-time, but the Russians scored twice in the second half to win 4-3 – with or without the referee's connivance nobody quite knew.

Neither club initially flourished as peacetime resumed. Arsenal had serious debts following the pre-war building of their two magnificent art deco grandstands. Their rivals now started a momentum that was to return them to the limelight over the next 20 years. However, in the clubs' first ever meeting in the FA Cup – in the third round on January 8, 1949 – Arsenal won 3-0. Ditchburn, in goal, was surprisingly at fault for the opening goal in the first half by Ian McPherson. Don Roper and Doug Lishman made sure of victory in the second half in front of a surprisingly small crowd for the time of 47,314.

## **1950-1960**

If there had been some meaningful jousting in the first half of the 20th century, it can be said that in the second half the two clubs really got serious. With a rapid rise in media communication, including the arrival of television, the exchange of information on the affairs of each club raised the temperature of rivalry often to fever pitch. No quarter was given, and rather too often this included the physical

challenge in the bid for moral supremacy and glory. The two annual meetings became the most important fixtures of the season for both clubs, fought with an ever-growing degree of intensity.

Frank McLintock, who would arrive in the next decade when Tottenham Hotspur's fame was at its peak, has burning memories of the contests: "They were always massive matches, never mind whatever else you might be achieving at the time. They were battles for bragging rights for the rest of the season. Maybe it's a bit different nowadays, with so many foreigners involved at both clubs, but I think in time they get educated! Reaction to any defeat depended on the character of the team, and occasionally you would lose badly. But the dressing room would try to use this to good effect – you were smarting so much you'd attempt to show defeat was a one-off. Yet in our day, certainly, each team appreciated the qualities of the other. At Highbury we always liked Spurs, admired their style of play. There was always the prospect of a terrific professional encounter."

A single-goal victory, with Eddie Baily the scorer, at White Hart Lane in December 1950, was the launch-pad for promoted Tottenham Hotspur to win their first League championship. Seven points – two for a win – in four matches over Christmas took them to the top of the table and they were seldom challenged thereafter. Early in the season they had drawn at Highbury. Their average home attendance during that season was an exceptional 55,486.

Arsenal's response was to come close to achieving the Double in 1951/1952, losing the FA Cup final to Newcastle United by the only goal and finishing third in the League, four points behind Manchester United. Meanwhile, the chances of Spurs retaining their title that season were hit when they lost 2-1 at home to Arsenal on February 9. Alex Forbes scored the winner when he luckily received the ball from a clearance which bounced off the referee. Tottenham Hotspur's push-and-run style, initiated by their manager Arthur Rowe, based on his experience when coaching in Hungary, helped to brighten Spurs's popular appeal.

In 1952/1953, Spurs lost in the semi-final of the FA Cup to the eventual winners, Blackpool – a round after Arsenal had fallen to the same team. But Arsenal returned to champion form in the League. They had twice defeated Spurs, 3-1 away and 4-0 at home, with Spurs's elegant style exposed as lacking substance. In the mid-1950s, Tottenham Hotspur's flair under Rowe temporarily stalled, though they did win for the first time in 20 years at Highbury, 3-0 in February 1954, with winger George Robb scoring twice.

The following season Arsenal won both games, never mind the arrival at White Hart Lane of Danny Blanchflower. His influence at least ensured the

return of Tottenham Hotspur's class, as proved by a double success over Arsenal in 1955/1956, thanks in part to plunderer Bobby Smith, only for Arsenal to reverse the feat the following season with consecutive 3-1 victories. By 1957/1958 Spurs were under the command of Bill Nicholson, and getting into full swing. They scored seven goals against Arsenal – three in a home win and shared the honours 4-4 at Highbury. Arsenal's workhorse midfielders Dave Bowen and Jimmy Bloomfield found themselves outclassed by the wit of Blanchflower.

## 1960-1970

A lacklustre spell for Arsenal extending from the mid-1950s into the 1960s was accentuated by the finest moment in Tottenham Hotspur's history: the achievement, for the first time in the 20th century, of the coveted Football League and FA Cup Double. Their task had been harder than when Preston and Aston Villa had achieved their Doubles in the late 19th century, when fewer teams were involved in either competition. To add to Arsenal's discomfort, in the process Spurs inflicted a league double on their greatest rivals.

At Highbury in September, they equalled their club record of seven successive wins with a 3-2 victory. Frank Saul, a 17-year-old reserve centre-forward, was making his debut and scored after only 12 minutes. Terry Dyson made it 2-0, and after David Herd and Gerald Ward had levelled in the second half, Les Allen, though seemingly offside, gave Spurs the points with a looping shot a quarter of an hour from the end. At home in January, Spurs were even more dominant, with Blanchflower and Dave Mackay controlling the middle of the field. Allen, Blanchflower with a penalty and Bobby Smith gave them a 3-1 lead at half-time after John Henderson had opened the scoring for Arsenal. Allen's second goal on the hour settled the issue, despite Joseph Haverty's late goal for Arsenal.

The elegance of Tottenham Hotspur's play, especially that of Blanchflower and John White – sadly to die prematurely in 1964 when struck by lightning as he sheltered under a tree while playing golf – together with the goalscoring skills of left-winger Cliff Jones, brought crowds flocking from all over the country to see Nicholson's super team. By the time that the Double was clinched in the Cup Final against Leicester City, an anti-climax as a match, the conclusion was no surprise. Nicholson's organisation and the response of his players had been a magnetic attraction.

In this duel of North London, the 1960s undoubtedly belonged to Arsenal's

rivals, though they did just begin to mount a counter-challenge towards the end of the decade. In nine of the 10 seasons Spurs were to finish in front of them in the League, additionally winning the FA Cup three times. Discomfort at Highbury, with the overbearing shadow of past achievements by Chapman and Whittaker, was leaden. And the situation might have been worse. Though Arsenal marginally stopped the rot, so to speak, when winning 2-1 at home in December 1961, shortly after Jimmy Greaves had arrived from Milan to strengthen Nicholson's battalion, Spurs came close to repeating the Double in 1962. They retained the Cup in a classic final against Burnley, after squandering a repeat League title against Alf Ramsey's upstart Ipswich Town team.

Spurs were also unlucky losers in a titanic European Cup semi-final with Benfica, though their trophy collection increased with the winning of the Cup Winners' Cup in 1963, after overrunning Atletico Madrid 5-1 in Rotterdam.

The next couple of seasons saw a partial revival at Highbury under Billy Wright's management. Joe Baker and Geoff Strong were rattling in the goals as George Eastham organised the midfield; a last-minute header by Strong concluded a memorable 4-4 draw at Highbury against the old enemy in the autumn of 1963. There were further encouraging signs the following season, with Baker and John Radford both scoring in a 3-1 home victory over Spurs, but 1965/1966 was to prove low-key for both clubs. Tottenham Hotspur's Double-winning team was winding down and finished eighth, while Arsenal's 14th place was their lowest for 36 years and presaged the departure of Billy Wright.

The arrival of Bertie Mee as manager did not immediately reverse the pecking order: Spurs did the league double over Arsenal in 1966/1967, with only Ian Ure in central defence preventing a rout at Highbury as Terry Venables orchestrated a 2-0 victory. The following season, however, the influence of Frank McLintock in midfield was beginning to yield rewards, with Arsenal winning 4-0 at Highbury. They had a toehold on the recovery of their self-esteem.

Another reason for Arsenal's improvement was the establishment in goal of Bob Wilson, who became the team's foundation stone between 1967 and 1974. He well remembers the intensity of the North London conflicts, marked in 1968/1969 – a season in which Arsenal lost 3-1 to Swindon Town in their second consecutive League Cup Final defeat – by a winning derby double, 2-1 away and 1-0 at home.

"If you spoke to the Tottenham Hotspur boys of our era, they would tell you that Bill Nicholson said these were the only games that mattered in any season!" Wilson recalls. "I played against them so many times, including the two League Cup semi-finals of 1969, which were shameful affairs, kicking lumps out of each

other – though nowadays we all play golf together and joke about how it used to be. We play at Brookmans Park, and the golf club members are nicely divided between which football club they want to play with on the day. It certainly was bitter in my time, and no less so on the terraces. You could hear the chants – ‘You know you’re scum’. It’s been like it for years, where it seems like life or death. I know we felt it when we played. Yet Bill Nicholson hated that semi-final of 1969. I was badly kicked by Alan Gilzean, totally out of character; Nicholson was really alarmed that I might have a break. Yet the language then, it must be said, was never as horrible as you hear now though the physical severity on the terraces was worse, with open violence. If we’d had the refereeing then that we have now, we’d have been reduced to five or six a side.

"The emotional tendency will never stop, and in 2006 the rivalry for a qualifying place in the Champions League intensified it even more. We always used to say that there were two objectives in any season – to do the Cup and League Double, and beat Tottenham [Hotspur]. If you lost to them, the hangover lasted through the following week. Though local rivalry exists everywhere – in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham – I think this one in London seems special. While I was coaching at Highbury, the Friday morning five-a-sides had more to them if we were playing Spurs the following day. You could sense that our fellows were ‘sharpening their feet’, with a particular spring in their step." Any incentive that an Arsenal revival might need was provided in 1969/1970 by Spurs doing the league double over them, even leading by three goals at Highbury before belated strikes from James Robertson and Radford made the scoreline respectable. Arsenal’s newly emerging character was confirmed, however, with victory in the Fairs Cup Final over Anderlecht.

## **1970-1980**

The wait, Arsenal would say, was worth it. After a decade of playing second fiddle, they now had the ultimate prize: a double double, beating their rivals home and away in the League, on the way to emulating Tottenham Hotspur’s League and Cup Double of 10 years earlier. They sealed the League with victory in the final fixture, the perfect climax of a one-goal victory at White Hart Lane. What more could you ask for? An opening salvo had come with Spurs losing 2-0 at Highbury in September, which was Arsenal’s fourth home match without conceding a goal. George Armstrong, who was to be so definitive a figure on Arsenal’s left flank, scored both goals. His telling touch was to be there again at the thrilling conclusion, his cross providing Ray Kennedy with the winning

header in off the crossbar four minutes from the end of a tumultuous match, which had almost as many fans locked out on Tottenham High Road as there were inside.

The occasion could not have been tenser: a goalless draw would give Arsenal the title on goal average, a scoring draw would yield it to Leeds United. It was the ultimate of knife edges. The icing on the cake followed five days later with victory over Liverpool at Wembley, this trophy also seized with a moment of unforgettable drama: a thunderbolt of a goal from way out by Highbury's home-grown boy, Charlie George. Arsenal followers remained delirious not just for days but weeks, some even for years.

There are, of course, those eager to make comparisons with Tottenham Hotspur's performance in 1961, and in this honours are just about even. In Arsenal's favour is the fact that they played 64 games – 42 in the League, nine in the FA Cup, five in the League Cup and eight in the Fairs Cup – as against Tottenham Hotspur's 49. Unquestionably, 10 years on, the pressure had been greater upon Arsenal. Yet none can deny that while Bertie Mee's team, so assiduously coached by Don Howe, were a lesson in efficiency, Nicholson's men had possessed the wider appeal for neutrals. They won 31 League matches, two more than Arsenal, and their goalscoring tally of 115 far outstripped Arsenal's 71. Characteristic of their forthright defence, Arsenal conceded a mere 29 League goals compared with Tottenham Hotspur's 55, a tribute to the reliability of Wilson in goal. What distinguished the Spurs side was their away form, earning as many points on their travels as they did at White Hart Lane. Yet an important accolade for Mee's assembly was that only three of them had arrived by transfers: McLintock from Leicester, McNab from Huddersfield and George Graham from Chelsea. Of the 16 players used by Arsenal in this season, nine had been developed from the junior ranks, including the teenage Kennedy, Armstrong, Rice and Eddie Kelly.

If Arsenal were now enjoying four prestigepacked seasons – a Fairs Cup success over Anderlecht (1970), the Double the following year, runners-up to Leeds in the FA Cup in 1972 and to Liverpool in the League in 1973 – Tottenham Hotspur were not wholly cast into the shadows. They quietly had their own say with a 2-0 victory over Aston Villa in the League Cup final in 1971, repeating this success two years later against Norwich. They also enjoyed a UEFA Cup Final win over Wolves in 1972 and were runners-up to Feyenoord in 1974. The Nicholson touch was still working and the rivalry was alive and flourishing.

Arriving at Highbury in 1971 was Alan Ball, a World Cup star of 1966 surprisingly released by Everton. He discovered in North London a conflict as



vivid as the one on Merseyside. "The Spurs matches had a special edge, you knew you were representing the fans," he remembers. "They were closer to us then and as a player you were aware that the game added an intensity to their lives, that the majority of them were supporting the club their entire life. The awareness of this gets through to you; you sense it's their day as much as yours, that this loyalty passes from generation to generation. And if you don't sense that, you'll probably get beaten."

With the sudden departure of Don Howe to West Bromwich Albion, seeking his own platform as the man in charge, the authority of Mee's team declined quite swiftly, and would revive only with the arrival of Terry Neill as manager in 1976. One of Neill's first signings was Pat Jennings, brought down the road from White Hart Lane on account of a strange misjudgment by an otherwise astute Keith Burkinshaw. The Spurs manager calculated that the best had been seen of Northern Ireland's quietly spoken but exceptional goalkeeper. "It was entirely Keith's decision that I should leave," recalls Jennings. "We played golf together – we still do, in fact – and the year I left I'd missed 21 games with an ankle injury, and Keith had the view that Barry Daines, my replacement, was now the better bet. Yet I had no doubt that I was still among the top keepers, that there was no way I couldn't continue playing. I'd fixed to go to Ipswich (then under Bobby Robson), but while they were away playing in Holland, Trevor Whymark broke a leg and suddenly Robson had other priorities. Terry [Neill] was pressing for me to join him at Highbury, and on the day I went to White Hart Lane when the decision that I was available became apparent, I was blanked by the directors. It was insulting that after 13 years' service they wanted to sell me."

Jennings' arrival in 1977, with Spurs having just been relegated, was a factor in Arsenal reaching three successive FA Cup finals between 1978 and 1980. Jennings continued a distinguished career to reach a then-world record total of 119 international caps and a mammoth 1,098 firstclass appearances. Arriving from Tottenham Hotspur, Jennings was, of course, no stranger to the rivalry. "In my time, I don't think there was quite the hatred that seems to exist nowadays," Jennings says. "It was just intense rivalry, bigger than anything else in the season. Bill Nic used to stress that they were the games that really mattered, the ones you had to win. I knew my reputation was at stake, moving to such a great club as Arsenal. Yet they upped my wages, gave me a four-year contract and I played another 300 games or so over seven years. When I left Highbury, after the World Cup in 1986 with Ireland in Mexico, I went back to White Hart Lane as cover for Tony Parkes. In spite of what had happened before, Tottenham Hotspur were my team, I had a relationship with their supporters. I have nothing but admiration for the club." While Jennings was enjoying his Indian summer of

Wembley appearances against Ipswich Town (defeat, 1978), Manchester United (victory, 1979) and West Ham United (defeat, 1980), Burkinshaw was busy returning Tottenham Hotspur to the First Division at the first attempt in 1978.

## 1980-1990

The era of Terry Neill, 1976-1983 – returning to the Club after spending two years as manager of Spurs – brought some drama in the FA Cup, but it encouraged what proved to be false horizons in the League. His reign at Highbury began to fade in the early 1980s, when a resourceful Burkinshaw was generating new impetus at White Hart Lane. He had stolen a march on the rest of the English clubs by his signing of Argentinian World Cup heroes Osvaldo Ardiles and Ricky Villa, and this initiative led to FA Cup successes in 1981 and 1982 (against Manchester City and Queens Park Rangers respectively). They were also League Cup runners-up to Liverpool in 1982 and UEFA Cup winners against Anderlecht two years later. For Neill, the departure to Italy of Liam Brady, the end of Malcolm Macdonald's career through injury and the transfer of Frank Stapleton to Manchester United proved to be losses too heavy to bear. Final League positions of third, fifth and 10th, from 1981-83, were hardly failure, but were considered insufficient for a club like Arsenal.

"The situation for me, arriving at Highbury from White Hart Lane in 1976, was a bit different," recalls Neill. "I was conditioned to the rivalry over many years, having been a player there before moving into management. Sure, the challenge was immense, especially in those days when the emphasis on the domestic game was stronger; it hadn't become global in the way that it is now. Although the first thing you looked at when the fixtures were published before each season was when you'd meet your North London rivals, it was not unusual for players of the two clubs to meet on a Saturday night for a beer or two. Many of us lived in the same area around Southgate, we often used public transport together and when I was a player at Highbury, Mackay, Gilzean and others would be there having a drink in the same spot as we were. Yes, the matches were all about being top dogs, and the emotional aspect was stronger after a game than before. If you'd lost, you'd keep your head down for a week or two. It's a cliché, but results did affect output and morale in the workplace, it did affect the happiness of people from week to week, and as player or manager you were aware of the weight of expectation. The game was everything. George Graham was married on a Saturday morning before meeting Spurs at Highbury, and Terry Venables, who'd been with him at Chelsea and was now at Tottenham

Hotspur, was his best man. Whatever the rivalry on the pitch, emotionally the players from each club were in the same game together. When I moved from Hull to become manager of Spurs in 1974, Bertie Mee did me a wonderful favour. In my first game against Arsenal, a dogged goalless draw at White Hart Lane, Bertie decided to leave me the floor, a chance to get in a few words just as I was starting."

Returning to Highbury to succeed Neill, Don Howe had two years in charge, but was unable to revive their fortunes, and both North London clubs experienced an uncomfortable hiccup. Burkinshaw was sacked and there followed a three-year spell in which Spurs had three managers in Peter Shreeves, David Pleat and Terry Venables, the latter having a tempestuous reign alongside chairman Alan Sugar. As for Arsenal, it was not until George Graham arrived at Highbury in 1986 that their fortunes took an upward turn. Graham was, in some ways, from the same mould as Don Revie, elegant creative midfield players who became disciplinarian managers, in Revie's case at Leeds.

In Graham's first season, they won the League Cup, defeating Liverpool 2-1, and the following year were runners-up to Luton Town, losing 3-2. In 1989, they regained the League title for the first time in 18 years. In guiding Arsenal back to the top, Graham mirrored the team of Mee and Howe, by making them functionally efficient and, in the opinion of some, successful but boring.

## **1990-2000**

Although the reign of Terry Venables brought Spurs FA Cup victory in 1991 – Nottingham Forest being defeated 2-1 in the game in which Paul Gascoigne's self-inflicted injury marred much of the rest of his career – his tenure ended in a cloud of controversy. The 1990s witnessed Spurs's gradual decline and Arsenal's emergence alongside Manchester United as the two most powerful clubs in the land. Though Graham's enlightened management ended abruptly through financial scandal in 1995, he would be succeeded, following a brief period under Bruce Rioch, by a manager-coach even more accomplished than Herbert Chapman some 60 years earlier. Arsenal were to create an image of permanence at the top that left Spurs seriously out-classed. In succession to Venables, Spurs would appoint another five managers during the 1990s: Shreeves (again), Ardiles, Gerry Francis, Christian Gross and Graham. Their only brief sight of glory in that time was a League Cup victory against Leicester City under Graham in 1999. Such was Arsenal's power, they barely considered clashes with their traditional enemy down the Seven Sisters Road.

The decade's only high for Spurs came in the FA Cup semi-final prior to meeting Nottingham Forest at Wembley – the event switched to the national stadium for security reasons following the disaster of the Hillsborough semi-final two years earlier. It was a key moment for Arsenal, who were bidding for their second League and Cup Double – Graham would successfully guide them to their second League title in three years just a few weeks later. The prospect of defeat was all the more stark for Tottenham Hotspur, who were allegedly £10 million in the red. Sugar and Venables were aligned to buy the club,

At Wembley, though, their fortunes were lifted within five minutes when Paul Gascoigne – who had just recovered from a hernia operation – scored with a wonder goal from a long-range free kick, conceded by Anders Limpar after a loose, late challenge about 35 yards out. Worse for Arsenal was to follow within a quarter-of-an-hour when Gary Lineker took his chance from Gascoigne's back heel. Although Alan Smith put Arsenal back in the match with a far-post header, Lineker restored Tottenham Hotspur's two-goal lead midway through the second half. Five League games remained in which Arsenal could clinch the title, but for the moment all they were left remembering was Gascoigne's stunning opening goal. As Graham reflected afterwards: "It was a bitterly disappointing experience for my players, but the true test of their character is whether they can bounce back." They could.

When the clubs met again in the FA Cup semifinal two years later, the occasion was soured by nastiness. Four months earlier a thoroughly disagreeable League encounter at White Hart Lane had ended with a 1-0 win for Spurs, but the referee had ignored a tackle on Ray Parlour that had seemed an obvious penalty, and protests at half-time by Graham led to an FA fine. In the event, the semi-final, running to seven minutes of added time, was tediously forgettable, and notable only for its moments of spitefulness (in marked contrast to the happiness of the previous day's semi-final meeting of Sheffield Wednesday and Sheffield United). The only goal of a niggly game was a far-post header by Adams from Paul Merson's free kick, for a victory which meant that Arsenal would face Sheffield Wednesday in both domestic cup finals – and be triumphant in both.

The following season Graham's men took the Cup Winners' Cup with a 1-0 win over Parma in Copenhagen, though their defence of the trophy the following season ended in a 2-1 defeat in the final to Real Zaragoza. A year later Graham was gone and in 1998 Arsène Wenger, the articulate Frenchman, would exultantly lead Arsenal to their second League and Cup Double, defeating Newcastle United in a mediocre final at Wembley.

## 2000-2006

Enduring success at Highbury under the meticulous guidance of Wenger, together with the continual purchase of foreign stars, served to intensify the disaffection of their neighbours, who continued to struggle in their search for the return of old glories. With the Double achieved once, Wenger's evolving side proceeded to repeat the act in 2002, won the title for a third time in 2004, and in an exceptional sequence of sustained form yielded only to the parallel brilliance of Manchester United. They finished runners-up to Sir Alex Ferguson's brigade in 2000, 2001 and 2003, and were again runners-up in 2005 behind Chelsea.

Equal panache was exhibited in the FA Cup, with wins in 2002, 2003 and 2005 against Chelsea, Southampton and Manchester United respectively. Poor Spurs could only wince from the sidelines. White Hart Lane continued to see a succession of managerial changes and the evident instability was increased by a shortage of funds. George Graham was succeeded by former home idol Glenn Hoddle, but he lasted only two years. David Pleat then temporarily took up the reins before handing over, equally briefly, to Jacques Santini. Finally, in November 2004, the redoubtable Dutchman Martin Jol arrived. Jol was the personification of stability, emotional equanimity and shrewd judgment of how to begin to restore Tottenham Hotspur's credibility. Against this backdrop, and with nothing to lift their pride other than being runners-up to Blackburn Rovers in the League Cup in 2002, envy of Arsenal – often spilling over into spitefulness – has characterised the mood on the Tottenham Hotspur terraces in the 21st century. Their only perverse satisfaction would be that in spite of other glories, Wenger's teams failed to prosper on the European front.

Spurs had a relatively minor chance of reprisal in the FA Cup semi-final of 2001. The outcome was worse than a damp squib. Not only did they lose 2-1 after taking an early lead through Gary Doherty, but this turned out to be the last appearance by rock-solid defender Sol Campbell before he defected to the enemy.

That perceived treachery was more than any White Hart Lane loyalist could bear, and his controversial decision deepened the pool of poison that now separated the two clubs. Such emotions should not find substance in what is, after all, only a game, but what appeared, from the perspective down Tottenham High Road, to be straightforward avarice – Campbell having rejected lesser offers from foreign clubs – made even sober Spurs supporters more morally cynical about the contemporary ethics of the game. In Campbell's defence, this bighearted, exemplary professional on the field was motivated in part by the

prospect of enhancing his continuing selection for England, and also by the convenience of remaining near his family in East London. His situation was to a degree similar to that of Graham when he became Tottenham Hotspur manager in 1998, and Campbell would have to endure hostility whenever the two clubs met in future.

The semi-final at Old Trafford was accompanied by the name of David Rocastle reverberating around the Highbury section of the crowd in tribute to a player who in the 1980s had brought distinction to the Club and who had died prematurely a week earlier. With Patrick Vieira controlling the middle of the field, the game was always slipping from Tottenham Hotspur's grasp. Vieira himself levelled the scores, and his elusive compatriot Robert Pires struck the winner a quarter-of-an-hour from the end. It was a crushing start for Hoddle, who had only just arrived in the job; Spurs's poverty in possession starkly exposed the size of the task in hand. Arsenal, simply, were in a different class.

They still were three years later, too, when they arrived at White Hart Lane nine points clear of second-placed Chelsea in the League with five games remaining. Spurs, to their modest satisfaction, would rescue a draw after being two goals behind, but with Chelsea defeated earlier in the day, 2-1 by Newcastle, the draw was not enough to deny their rivals, and a euphoric Campbell, from celebrating another title. Within three minutes, Thierry Henry had fed Dennis Bergkamp on the left and his low cross was swept into the net by Vieira. Before half-time Pires struck his 19th goal of the season. Jamie Redknapp reduced the lead on the hour and in added time Robbie Keane snatched a point from the penalty spot. Too little too late, except perhaps for a modicum of honour. "This team is fantastic and we can play some great football," proclaimed Campbell. "There have been times in the season when it was going against us, and we dug it out." The delight for Wenger, and further angst for Spurs, was that Arsenal had won the title without losing a single game.

And so to that heated, accusation-riddled, explosive meeting another two Aprils onward, the last derby encounter to be staged at Highbury prior to the move to Emirates Stadium. Ron Greenwood used to advise his West Ham players to have patience and wait five months rather than five minutes to inflict retribution for an opponent's provocative tackle. Tottenham Hotspur waited, you might say, 93 years for retribution for Arsenal pitching their tent at Highbury in 1913 in a commercially oriented switch from Woolwich. With the two clubs now locked in a battle for fourth place, and the final qualifying spot for the following season's Champions League competition, victory for both was paramount. A goal by Robbie Keane that provoked protestations from Arsène Wenger meant that Spurs earned a 1-1 draw that left the position wide open. There was the

possibility that Arsenal might need to reach and then win that season's Champions League Final should Spurs stay ahead of them after their final domestic League matches: Spurs away to West Ham, Arsenal home to Wigan Athletic.

The controversy was sparked when Emmanuel Eboué, a 54th-minute substitute for injured centre-half Philippe Senderos, and Gilberto collided while making a tackle. This left Michael Carrick free with the ball. Referee Steve Bennett glanced at the fallen players and saw no reason to halt the game. Carrick, momentarily doing likewise, played the ball down the wing to Edgar Davids, whose low cross was swept into the net by Keane in the 66th minute.

On the touchline, Wenger and Martin Jol were confronting each other nose-to-nose. Jol, in the opinion of most neutrals a fair-minded man, would claim that he was watching Davids, concerned about his staying onside, and was not looking at the fallen Arsenal players. "I don't believe he didn't see it," Wenger claimed. "You cannot steal the game like that and then pretend you have not seen it." Henry was more generous than his manager. "Carrick told me he didn't see them on the ground. I've known Edgar Davids for a long time and he's an honest guy. They both said that they didn't see it, and I want to believe them," Henry said.

The controversy, sadly, ensured that the rivalry between the clubs would remain as heated as ever at the new stadium, and it was a pity that the parting joust at Highbury generated such ill will, for it was one of the finest matches of the season. Tottenham Hotspur, against opponents reduced in strength by Wenger's preparation for the Champions League semi-final second leg against Villarreal three days later, undoubtedly had the edge until Wenger sent out Henry to balance the books. It was typical of Peter Hill-Wood that in assessing Keane's goal, he felt in no doubt that it was legitimate. Hill-Wood upheld three generations of sportsmanship by his family with his view of the crucial incident. "In the heat of the moment, players tend to over-react," he said. "I believe that unless the referee blows the whistle, you carry on. He saw the collision. Players have become more gentlemanly than they used to be, kicking the ball out of play if someone goes down, but, as far as I could tell, Tottenham's players were looking ahead, down the wing. I didn't feel they did anything wrong."

Many commentators afterwards questioned the wisdom of Wenger's selection, leaving Henry, Cesc Fabregas and Eboué on the bench, while Alexander Hleb and Bergkamp were not even among the substitutes. This cautionary selection had allowed Spurs to dominate the match in the first hour, with Aaron Lennon overpowering Mathieu Flamini at left-back and Carrick controlling midfield. Wenger denied that his selection had been a problem, and

indeed the arrival of Henry had swiftly produced a stunning equalising goal, one of the most sublime in balance and touch that he has ever scored. "It was a physical problem," Wenger asserted. "We play every three days, and people maybe don't realise that you can sometimes suffer. It's difficult to imagine how much tension there is in the European games, we play Villarreal on Tuesday. Do you know how many players they will rest this weekend? Ten. Of course, people will criticise because Thierry didn't start, but if Spurs had not stolen that goal we would have won the game."

In the event, Arsenal's qualification was secured on the final day, though not without further controversy surrounding Spurs. While Arsenal roared to runaway victory against Wigan, in a last joyous hurrah at Highbury, Tottenham Hotspur were beaten at West Ham after many of their players had been struck down with a stomach bug before the game. An official request for a delayed kick-off to allow players to re-hydrate was refused and Spurs's season concluded with the belief the world was somehow against them.

Clearly this is one rivalry which was going to be just as keenly felt at Arsenal's new stadium.

**David Miller**



## INTERVIEW

# **The best of enemies**

**Arsenal versus Spurs is the only game that really matters in North London – Frank McLintock and Martin Chivers tell Alan Smith about the bitter rivalry, and the friendship**

The North London derby: a perennially feisty fixture brimming with passion and desire, guaranteed to stir the blood of any self-respecting fan. Whether you are Arsenal or Tottenham Hotspur, this neighbourhood duel is a matter of honour, a game conferring local bragging rights for the next few months at least. Win and you crow with a superior smile, lose and you lay low until the next time. For the actual protagonists, victory tastes sweet, no matter what it says on your birth certificate. Whether someone hails from Stoke Newington or Stoke, Holloway or Holland, Islington or the Ivory Coast, the fierce sense of rivalry cannot be dimmed. No chance of that when anyone entering the mix is informed straight away what this fixture means to the locality.

Coming down from Leicester, I got the message clearly enough during the run-up to my first derby in 1987. Everywhere you went, the game was being talked about. The anticipation grew with each passing day. Luckily, the occasion turned out well: Arsenal won 2-1 at White Hart Lane. During this period, in fact, that particular scoreline became unusually common, occurring three times in succession. Gloating Arsenal fans would joke that if you wanted to find out the result of the North London derby you could just pick up the phone and dial 2-1, 2-1, 2-1.

Not so humorous from their point of view – or indeed from mine – was the FA Cup semi-final at Wembley in 1991, now regarded up the other end of the Seven Sisters Road as one of Spurs's finest hours in the old enemy's company. Paul Gascoigne's fizzing free kick, Gary Lineker's brace: the day ended in misery for a set of Arsenal players who had virtually forgotten how to lose in this, a dominant, title-winning year.

Two years later, at the same stage of the same competition, a header by Tony Adams somewhat redressed the balance. Yet even better was to come 11 years later when a 2-2 draw on enemy soil was enough to clinch the title for Arsène Wenger's side in a match that brought back memories of a night long ago when Ray Kennedy's header created history.

May 3, 1971: on duty that famous evening were Frank McLintock and Martin Chivers, two heroes of their time, one an inspirational leader who captained Arsenal to Double-winning glory, the other a powerful and highly elegant centreforward who scored 174 goals for Spurs over eight years. This pair

played in an era when the two sets of players lived in fairly close proximity, setting up home in North London's leafy suburbs. Whether it was Winchmore Hill or Whetstone, Brookmans Park or Barnet, the local paper shops could boast some pretty famous customers.

So, too, could one local pub, the White Hart in Southgate, favoured watering hole of many lads back then. Put your head round the door and you might just catch the right-back who had, the previous Saturday, been kicking lumps out of his winger enjoying a friendly pint with said adversary. It happened all the time. The two sets of players happily socialised together – when they weren't locking horns at Highbury or The Lane. On that score, McLintock against Chivers must have been quite a contest – the doughty Scot versus the even-tempered Sassenach in a fascinating contrast guaranteed to deliver. Whoever came out on top on each occasion would surely nudge their side towards victory.

The temptation was irresistible, therefore, to reunite the pair, this time over lunch and a few glasses of wine, to mull over old times and discuss, in particular, those old derby scraps. Between January 1968 and November 1971, these two stalwarts actually crossed swords six times in this fixture. Mind you, it wasn't always in direct opposition. For the first couple of clashes, McLintock was used at half-back rather than the centre-half slot where he later carved a niche as Arsenal's driving force. Nevertheless, the same principle applied: who could gain the upper hand over the old foe?

Unsurprisingly, these past masters could not recall every single detail of the matches in question. Some tussles, in fact, had been lost altogether from hazy memory banks spanning hundreds of games. Certain occasions, on the other hand, will never be erased, such as that titanic showdown in '71.

But let's begin at the beginning where, on a happier note from Tottenham Hotspur's point of view, Chivers enjoyed a winning home debut following his transfer from Southampton...

## **January 20, 1968: Spurs 1 Arsenal 0**

**Martin Chivers** I was staying at the Alexandra National Hotel in Finsbury Park. I remember being brought up to White Hart Lane for this match in a chauffeur-driven car, crawling through the crowds. It was just bewildering for a lad who'd just come up from Southampton and it was only afterwards that I realised how important this game was, when Bill Nicholson [the Spurs manager at the time] said these were the two most important games of the season. Anyway, it was played in six inches of mud and I've gone in after the game and sat down next to

Jimmy Greaves. Jimmy puts his hand on my leg and says: "What was that like then big fella?" I said: "It was brilliant, Jim. The atmosphere was unbelievable, but I can't play on that pitch. It's terrible!" Here's me thinking I'm confiding in him and then he shouts out: "Don't tell me you can't play on it, tell Bill over there. He'd love to hear that after just spending so much money on you." Put me right in it, he did.

**Frank McLintock (laughing)** Did he really? That was Jimmy for you. But I remember that we didn't have a proper team at that point. We were still building, still improving. Billy Wright had not long left and the first year under Bertie [Mee] was hard graft. There was plenty of discipline, but very little quality. Jim Furnell was the keeper that day. "Two-touch Jim" I used to call him because he always needed two touches to gather the ball! Lovely guy, though. Became a top scout for Blackburn Rovers during Jack Walker's ownership. Spurs's goal, if I remember rightly, came from a short back-pass by Peter Simpson. It was unusual for Peter to make a mistake. He was very consistent, a very unassuming guy who was great to play with. But he was so pessimistic sometimes. He'd say: "Oh, we're going to struggle today." He lacked confidence beforehand but that always changed when he went on to the pitch.

**Chivers** This was only my second game. I'd scored the winning goal at Sheffield Wednesday on my debut – the first time Spurs had won there in years. After the Arsenal game we had to play at Manchester United in the FA Cup. I started my Spurs career really well because I scored our two goals in Manchester in a 2-2 draw. But Arsenal were always very well organised; they built all their success on defending well. Don Howe's philosophy was always: "If you don't give a goal away, you get a point." Spurs were the freeflowing, attacking team, but we were accused of not having any backbone. That probably came from our record up north. We could never get a result at Liverpool, for example. Mind you, when you've got someone like Dave Mackay playing at the back for you, I'm surprised that accusation could be levelled at us. He was as tough as old boots, was Dave. The most influential player Spurs ever had.

**McLintock** I was a massive fan of Dave's and Spurs was always a massive game as well, but we were the type of team who were always fired up anyway, no matter who we were playing. Mind you, it was always tough playing against you, Martin. Your shoulders always seemed about four foot wide! I could hit you all day long and never once did you come back at me. I could never understand that. You were very calm, you'd never retaliate. The hardest game I ever had against you was about a week after the Cup Final in '71 – England v Scotland at Wembley. I was coming up to my 73rd game including pre-season matches. I'd played every game that season. I was exhausted, but desperate to play against

England. You scored two goals that day, I think. Anyway, we came in at half-time and Bobby Brown, the Scotland manager, said: "Frank, Martin Chivers is winning every single header!" I said: "I bloody well know he is, but I can't do anything about it!" The thing was, Bobby Moore was pinging these flat balls into you and I couldn't get near them. In many ways I wish I had had the courage to pull up with a hamstring injury that day because I was absolutely knackered, dying to be substituted."

## **August 10, 1968: Spurs 1 Arsenal 2**

**McLintock** In some record books Spurs's goal is down as my own goal, but it wasn't. I've never scored an own goal in my life. We'd been to Germany that summer working a lot on how to close down opponents collectively. All the emphasis was on that part of our game. [At this point, Frank moves the salt and pepper pots around to demonstrate what he means.] Once we'd got that part worked out, Don, to be fair to him, went on to full-backs making runs, midfield players breaking into the box and all the attacking aspects of our game.

**Chivers** I remember that period and that game because right through pre-season I'd been struggling with a pain just below my left knee. I mentioned it to Bill Nic and he sent me to a specialist, who stuck a cortisone injection in there. I carried on through the early games, but it was still hurting. At the end of August I had a second cortisone injection. In the September I collapsed in a heap during one match with no one around me. My kneecap ended up here [he points to the top of his thigh]. I'd already pushed it back down when our physio came on. He asked me to bend my leg and when I did the kneecap started rising back up my thigh again so I stopped pretty quickly, I can tell you! I was out for a year after that. I was written off. The insurance companies were called in and I was all set to be paid off. That's why I remember that derby. I wasn't properly fit.

## **May 3, 1971: Spurs 0 Arsenal 1**

**Chivers** That Monday, Bill Nic told us all to get to the ground really early, because he knew [the traffic] was going to be busy. I turned up three hours before kick-off – about half-past four for the half-seven kick-off! I was OK, but Mullers [Alan Mullery], who came all the way from Worcester Park in Surrey, got stuck in Seven Sisters Road in all the traffic and had to leave his car and walk the rest of the way. He turned up 15 minutes before kick-off.

**McLintock** No wonder he was angry that night!

**Chivers** Yeah, he was the worst. The other lads got in a bit earlier. But there were forty-odd thousand stuck outside without a ticket. It would have been different if the game had been made all-ticket.

**McLintock** Our team bus pulled into Seven Sisters Road about an hour before kick-off and we were crawling along. We were only 100 yards away from the main entrance when I saw my wife, Barbara, with Geordie Armstrong's wife, Marge. The pavement was heaving and they were getting crushed against the wall. I jumped off the bus and grabbed them. Bertie Mee complained, saying ladies weren't allowed on the bus. I nearly strangled him! In all my days playing I had never seen a more congested area than outside White Hart Lane that night.

**Chivers** I was already inside the ground. I didn't know what was going on because I didn't have a reason to look out. We just sat around drinking tea, counting the players as they came in. As time went on – two hours before kick-off, an hour-and-a-half before kick-off – we were starting to wonder if everybody would make it.

**McLintock** It was the end of the season and we had everything to gain and Spurs had everything to gain by stopping us. I think the match stood up to what was expected. I thought Spurs played really well that night.

**Chivers** We certainly didn't lie down. We fought like hell. I remember Gilly [Alan Gilzean] hitting the outside of the post from an angle.

**McLintock** Come to think of it, I'd never seen Gilly so worked up as he was that night. He was charging around kicking people. That really wasn't like him at all. He caught Bob Wilson in the head with a late challenge.

**Chivers** I don't remember the match being over-physical. The pitch was quite dry by that time – they didn't used to water it much in those days – so it wasn't the sort of surface where you could slide into tackles.

**McLintock** No, you're right, it wasn't a dirty game. But I remember I actually had a chance to score before Ray Kennedy's goal. I was about 12 yards out and just about to lamp it into the net when the ref got in the way. I knocked him sparko. He looked up and said: "You've loosened my teeth." I said: "I'll knock them out next time if you don't get out of the way!" I was so angry.

**Chivers** There were only a couple of chances in the game. I wouldn't say Arsenal were necessarily going for the win because a 0-0 was going to do you. As the game wore on we were probably going forward more than you were. We had to score. You didn't.

**McLintock** We were pushing up really well as a back line and I remember catching you, Martin, and the lads offside quite a few times. You were all getting mixed up about which run to make because we were that good at pushing up.

**Chivers** It was always going to be a physical game, always was against Arsenal, but Spurs have always prided themselves on scoring goals. Playing at home, we thought we'd score sooner or later, but we just didn't get the opportunity. We'd probably scored in most of our home games that season but it just didn't happen that night. The onus wasn't on us. We were already in Europe after winning the League Cup. We weren't going to do any better than third or fourth in the league, but we definitely wanted to stop Arsenal from winning that Double. The only way we could do it was by scoring a goal. We gave it our very best crack, but they defended very well and in the end got the breakthrough. There were only about two minutes to go.

**McLintock** No, there were more than two minutes left, surely?

**Chivers** Nope, just two.

**McLintock** Are you sure? I'd have bet £100 that there were about eight minutes to go! I do know that I was knackered at the final whistle and got caught on the pitch. All I wanted to do was get back into the dressing room and celebrate with the lads, enjoy the moment, but I couldn't go anywhere. I was being pulled all over the place. People were wrapping scarves round my neck.

**Chivers** We were kicking that way, towards the tunnel, and so because we knew what was coming, we all dashed off at the end before the fans could get on. I didn't see what was happening on the pitch because I was away. Afterwards, we just waited for the crowds to subside and went home.

**McLintock** We just went to the White Hart. That was our place. The team bus used to drop us off there after away games. We didn't get there till about 11 o'clock and shortly after the landlord closed it so it was just us lot with some mates and a few of the landlord's friends. It was still heaving in there but it was mostly people we knew. We were there till five or six in the morning.

**Chivers** The Spurs players used to go down there as well. Not that night, of course, but we'd often meet up to have a drink. Peter Storey, who people always thought was a Jekyll and Hyde character, well, he was my best friend.

**McLintock** Was he really? Was that from your England days? **Chivers** Yeah, we used to be room-mates. I knew him from way back, when Southampton schoolboys played Aldershot. I actually fixed him up with his first wife. It just goes to show how we all got on back then.

**McLintock** I know, the supporters were fighting each other like crazy, but the players got on great! I've always been a big Spurs fan. Always loved the style of football. I remember going along with my girlfriend, who's now my wife, and standing in the shed end to watch Spurs play Fulham – 4-3 it was. Johnny Haynes played. He was brilliant that day. But it was always a great spectacle going down to Spurs with people like Danny Blanchflower, John



White, Dave Mackay. I actually used to park my car on Bill Nicholson's front drive whenever I went down. Bill would let me park at his house just round the corner from the ground. His wife, Darky, used to guide me in. Actually, I nearly signed for Spurs in 1964. Dave Mackay tried to get me there when Danny Blanchflower was coming to the end of his career. I heard Eddie Bailey [the coach] didn't fancy me. Whether that was true or not I don't know, but the move fell through and I signed for Arsenal. A month later Alan Mullery signed for Spurs.

**Chivers** Amazing how things work out, isn't it? Mind you, you get us playing, say, golf against each other and we still want to win. I played in a charity football match a few years back between Spurs and Arsenal. Bob Wilson was in goal for them, David Court played, so did Paul Davis and Liam Brady. And I tell you what, it got heated even then and some of us were 50 years of age!

**McLintock** You do forget how competitive you were when you were young. It gradually drifts away. But occasionally you get a glimpse of that old competitive spirit when something happens.

**Chivers** I know, I've been asked so many times to play against Arsenal in these charity games and I usually say no because I know that it won't be all that enjoyable. As players, we wouldn't care if it ended 0-0 as long as we didn't lose. That's no good for a charity game because people want it to be open and entertaining, but for us there's too much at stake. Even at our age, there's still too much at stake.

Not a bad way to end it. After all these years, supporters of both persuasions will be gratified to hear that the rivalry lives on, that the result of a kickabout between two sets of veterans still actually matters. Mates off the pitch, perhaps, but the burning fire of competition can never be truly extinguished. The flames might die down to a flicker with no fuel to feed on, but fan the embers gently and the old inferno returns.

For posterity's sake, the record of derbies involving this pair has been listed below. From six ties, it ended 3-2 to Frank with one draw. On hearing the result, Martin wasn't best pleased. Old habits die hard in this neck of the woods.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **A boot in both camps**

**A parting of the ways with Tottenham Hotspur in 1977 led Pat Jennings to make the short move from White Hart Lane to Highbury, where he spent a further eight years in goal**

It ranks as one of the worst decisions in the history of English football. When Tottenham Hotspur decided to sell their goalkeeper after 14 years of service at the age of 32, they obviously expected to watch from afar a giant in gentle decline. How wrong could they be? Pat Jennings played on for another decade. He appeared in the final stages of two World Cups, making a world record 119 appearances for his country before finishing his international career with a World Cup game against Brazil. He reached three FA Cup Finals and one European Cup Winners' Cup final. He was awarded the OBE. And, above and beyond all other hurts for Spurs, Jennings achieved all of the above with their deepest of arch-rivals, the Arsenal.

Even now it seems incredible that Spurs allowed one of their greatest players and most valuable servants to travel the short distance to Highbury one sunny day in August 1977. Sunny, that is, for the Gunners. "It's a long story, but basically, because of the rivalry, there was no way I would have gone to Arsenal if certain things hadn't happened," explains Jennings. "I'd more or less decided to go to Ipswich Town, in fact. I'd spoken to their manager Bobby Robson but then their centre-forward broke his leg on a pre-season tour to Holland and they had to spend the money on an outfield player instead. I'd got the needle at Tottenham Hotspur because I wasn't being offered a new contract. They were prepared to let me go. I'd been out with an ankle injury for part of the previous season and the manager, Keith Burkinshaw, obviously thought that the new boy, Barry Daines, was doing a good job. They wanted a big fee for me. They were prepared to let me go and yet they said it was me that wanted to leave.

"That's football. It's every club, not just Spurs. I am sure loads of people in football have got the same story. So I went to the ground, to White Hart Lane, one morning to say 'Cheerio' to the Spurs players, my team-mates, who were leaving for a pre-season tour to Sweden and every one of the directors got on the coach without saying a word. Not 'Sorry you're leaving' or 'Good luck'. Nothing. Not even a phone call. So that was it. From that day on I thought: 'What I am doing moving around the country if it doesn't mean anything to the directors after 14 years? What am I doing trying to find a transfer that suits them when that's the thanks I get for it?'

"Terry Neill, now manager of Arsenal, had been my manager at Spurs for a

while and he had been on to me for some time. He knew I could do the job. I knew I could do the job. I was still one of the five quickest players in training in terms of sprints. I knew there was no danger I couldn't play on. So it was the ideal move for me. I didn't have to move house. My kids, four of them, didn't have to leave school. I moved to Arsenal."

One of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, Jennings talks in a low, lilting lugubrious voice indicative of his unflappable nature. He was more than stoic in defence, he was an ocean of calm. Jittery defenders for Newry, Watford, Spurs, Arsenal and Northern Ireland across three decades were visibly soothed by his very presence. Volcanic strikers from rival teams found themselves expunged. He was the antidote to sulphurous attacks. He was professionally, permanently unfazed.

Just as well. His short move across North London provoked considerable controversy. Few men who have made the transfer across the picket line of tribal rivalry have gone about their business unmolested. Sol Campbell was hideously abused and physically threatened when he made his move in the summer of 2001. Willie Young was initially vilified. John Robertson, who scored for Spurs in the same FA Cup Final against Chelsea in which Jennings also played, kept a lower profile, but never quite proved his worth to a sceptical Highbury. Even the manager, Neill, had a roughish ride following his move from White Hart Lane. Like crossing the floor of the House of Commons, such moves were not conducive to affirming the bonds of love and loyalty.

However, Jennings, with his courage, skill and essentially pacifist personality, had the ideal combination to survive. "At Spurs, we hated Arsenal, but it was only a professional thing. Personally, I knew Pat Rice, Sammy Nelson, David O'Leary, Frank Stapleton, Liam Brady ... they were all lads who played with the Irish teams. I knew them ever so well. After games, we would have had a drink anyway, so there was no hatred. It was a professional hate. We wanted to win for the supporters. Even now, every game we play against Arsenal, I want Spurs to win. I'm Tottenham Hotspur through and through, but I still admire Arsenal. They're a fantastic club. I'll never have a bad word to say about them."

Making friends with his new team-mates was certainly no chore for the Irishman. "I would have been friendly with the Arsenal players for years anyway. I'd seen Frank McLintock in the local North London clubs. I'd seen them all socially and had the best of craic with them. There was no difference then, we were all in the same profession. I was friends with the West Ham boys too, like Bobby Moore. There was no hatred between players.

"For Arsenal, I put my head in where it hurt. Every time I went out to play I had a reputation to live up to. But I was brought up with the Gaelic game, so

getting hit didn't bother me."

Jennings's Newry upbringing explained much about his apparently imperturbable demeanour. Having played in his formative years amid the blood and thunder lawlessness of Gaelic football where every character could use his hands – and sometimes under-hand behaviour – how could turning out for Northern Ireland against Brazil or Arsenal against Tottenham Hotspur make him turn a single well-groomed hair? "I played the Gaelic game all through my school days, in midfield, so you were competing against everyone else with the hand. Without realising it, it was the best training I could have done for goalkeeping. Crosses and that were 10 a penny. That's where I got my one-handed catch from. Psychologically, it was such an advantage. In football, I was competing against players who could only use their heads. Plus I was just over six feet tall, I could probably jump another six. I knew I had a fantastic advantage.

"Gaelic football is a tough game. It's a game to get you used to taking knocks. I can't imagine an Arsenal goalkeeper like Jens Lehmann playing the Gaelic game. He is as good a goalkeeper as any in the country, brilliant at handling crosses, but he's got a blank about people coming and standing in front of him. There's nothing in the rule books that says you can't. Gaelic football taught me all that. It taught me not to show it when you got hurt – look at the players falling about nowadays. You probably got really hurt, but you picked yourself up and you didn't show it. Like rugby. Perhaps that is why I did feel calm during games. But I thought a lot about the games beforehand. I didn't worry exactly; I knew it was a brilliant game when you were winning. Or when you were not getting beat. But not when you were making mistakes. So I'd concentrate on not making mistakes. It was a pressure. I'd built up a fantastic reputation and every time I went out on the pitch I wanted to live up to that reputation. If I made a mistake, it would grab the headlines."

That attitude to perfection is what Spurs were letting go that summer of 1977. Perhaps by coincidence, perhaps not, Arsenal embarked on a run to three consecutive FA Cup Finals, 1978-1980, and played in the 1980 European Cup Winners' Cup Final against Valencia when Jennings, among others, remains convinced that Arsenal were the better team. "Much the better team, I'd say. Then it goes to penalties. I saved the first from Mario Kempes." That's the Mario Kempes, incidentally. The Mario Kempes who, two years earlier, had emerged as the glittering, long-haired hero of Argentina as they swept to World Cup glory in their homeland. Calmly, of course, Jennings had led the way for Arsenal by keeping the raging bull at bay. No big deal. "I'd saved quite a few in my time," he said. Then Liam Brady and Graham Rix missed their penalties and Arsenal

were forced to accept defeat.

It happens. It happens to the greatest of players. It had happened to Jennings in 1971 when he had been playing in goal for Tottenham Hotspur as Arsenal clinched the first leg of their famous Double at, of all places, White Hart Lane. "Oh yeah, I was playing that night, of all nights, against, of all teams, Arsenal. We wanted to win that one. The manager Bill Nicholson – if he never won another game all year, those games against Arsenal were the ones we had to win. But it wasn't to be. Ray Kennedy got the better of the late Cyril Knowles and headed one right in the corner. It was on the cards. They went on and won the FA Cup on the Saturday. It hurt because the rivalry meant so much in those days. I spent 14 years at Spurs. Other players like Martin Chivers, Alan Gilzean, Jimmy Greaves spent years and years at the club. Same with Arsenal. Frank McLintock, Geordie Armstrong, Charlie George – what a player he was, he should never have been allowed to leave. It was sad for the fans. The players who come in now haven't really got a clue what the rivalry is all about."

It was fierce, undoubtedly. Lesser men might have been daunted by the move into enemy territory. "Even now, some fans say to me that they've never really forgiven me. But that's partly because it wasn't made clear at the time that the club made the decision for me to go and not the other way around. They left it that I wanted to leave. I had to spend the next three years with the truth not known until Keith Burkinshaw said on television that it was the worst decision he had ever made for the club. But, to be honest, I was lucky. I didn't have too much grief from fans when I was on the pitch. It was just a personal thing. If I went out, people used to come and say: 'How come you went to Arsenal?' No death threats, no abuse, nothing like that."

Jennings is wrong, though: it wasn't all luck. It was respect. In 1976 Jennings was voted the Professional Footballers' Association Player of the Year, the ultimate accolade from his peers. When he next turned out at Highbury, still a Tottenham Hotspur player, he was accorded a standing ovation from the Arsenal fans. Admiration triumphed over bias. "It was unheard of really." The switch in loyalty was easier to achieve in the circumstances. "It was a problem for me going to Highbury obviously, because I had to start again. The Arsenal supporters were entitled to ask: 'Why are Tottenham allowing him to leave?' I couldn't live on my reputation. It was about me proving myself again. But it was brilliant. I'm one of the lucky ones, accepted by both sets of supporters and not too many people can say that."

Big Pat was being modest again. Being an icon probably helped.

Perhaps because it all came by accident. The schoolboy had never set out to be a professional footballer. "I left school on my 15th birthday and went to work

in a linen factory. Then it closed and I went to work with my dad for one of the builders' merchants in Newry. Just about that time I was picked to play for the Irish Youth Team at a tournament in England, but I didn't want to go. I'd never been away from home before – in fact I'd never been further south than Dublin or further north than Derry. But having reached the finals of the European Youth Tournament, I thought: 'Well, I've got to go'. Ten days later we finished up in the final against England at Wembley. I was playing at the Mecca of world football at the age of 17. There were players up and down the country who never got to Wembley in their lives and there was me fresh out of Newry. That's how lucky I was.

"I'd never even dreamed about professional football, I didn't think it was available to me. But that tournament was a shop window. England had an unbelievable team: Tommy Smith, who went on to captain Liverpool, Ron Harris – Chopper – who captained Chelsea, John Sissons who played for West Ham, Jon Sammels, the Arsenal. Meanwhile, Watford, and Jimmy Hill at Coventry, came in for me."

So that was the history. Born on June 12, 1945, Patrick Jennings grew up to play 119 times for Northern Ireland and over 1,000 top-level games in the English First Division. Bought by Spurs from Watford in 1964, he played 472 games for Arsenal's chief rivals, won the 1967 FA Cup and entered the record books during the Charity Shield match against Manchester United at Old Trafford in 1967, by scoring a 90-yard goal direct from his own penalty area, when his long kick bounced over Alex Stepney's head. "Basically, it was a fluke. A miracle," he admits. That was the player, statistically, that Arsenal got in 1977. There was also the player, majestically, to consider. He was the most economical of performers, the master of absolute calm. There was no swagger in his manner, only an incomparable sense of positioning and a set of famously huge hands with which to gather the ball.

In fact, the hands were by no means enormous – unless they have shrunk in the intervening years. They looked merely middling-to-large as he held them up for inspection. So mythology has weaved a few stories about him in the way that often befalls the great. He held the ball because he was a fine goalkeeper not because nature had made him a freak.

"We did really well at Arsenal, reaching those four cup finals. Unfortunately, I only won one of them. That was a disappointing thing. We felt we had a team that could have gone on to do what Liverpool did in the early 1980s, win the European Cup. We played them, Liverpool, four times in the semi-final of the 1980 FA Cup and they couldn't beat us. I felt we could have gone on to do what they did instead. But we allowed Liam Brady to go to Juventus, which I still



think is one of the biggest mistakes that Arsenal Football Club ever made. Anybody in the country could see that Liam should have stayed at Arsenal for 10 years. Frank Stapleton went to Ron Atkinson at Manchester United as well.

"I still think we could have won all those finals that we lost. The one we won, the one against Manchester United in 1979, we were coasting. But then it gave me the best and worst four minutes of my life. Leading 2-0 until the last minutes of the game, I'd been up the steps to pick up the Cup about six times in my mind. We'd gone into the last four minutes and all of a sudden they got a goal back. You think: 'Well, we're still all right because we're still leading.' Then they got another and you can see the headlines: 'Arsenal Blow It!' Then we go down the field and Alan Sunderland gets the winner. Relief! You can imagine. That's what I mean by the best and worst four minutes of my life.

"Off the field, it was fantastic too. The Irish boys, including me, introduced the English, Scots and Welsh to Irish music. We had the Dubliners on tape and Paddy Reilly and we played them up and down the motorways every week. They really liked it. We all got on really well."

Jennings finally left Arsenal after eight years and 326 appearances. Tottenham Hotspur, having learned the hard way about his value, had him back to play in the reserves as cover and so he maintained his match fitness all the way to the 1986 World Cup, where his final international match, 22 years after his first, was against the might of Brazil. Northern Ireland lost 3-0, but just qualifying for the World Cup constituted glory for the boys from Windsor Park.

It had all been a long, winding way from his debut international against Wales in April 1964 at the age of 18 when a player called George Best was also playing his first game for his country. One would have a considerably more extensive career than the other, prolonged perhaps by his quiet intensity. "Managers used to say: 'Lads, go out and enjoy it.' Enjoy it! I hated losing. I hated making mistakes. It would eat you. So I didn't really enjoy games. If the result was right, yeah it was fantastic, but, as a goalkeeper, you can't express yourself. You daren't make a mistake. That's my only regret, looking back. I'd probably try to enjoy it a bit more the second time around. I probably thought about it too much. Look at Bruce Grobbelaar at Liverpool. He'd miss cross after cross and still be smiling and laughing. But I couldn't do that."

He could keep goal, however. His pristine hands in later life – not a breakage, not a dislocation, ever troubled those famous features – were proof of his stately expertise. In fact, throughout his long career in hostile territory he never had to undergo a major operation. Only two identical incidents mar the perfect record. He had his nose broken at Coventry in the league and upon his return had it broken again during an international against Wales. His consultant

at Moorfields Hospital, aware of the Jennings legend, was astonished. But it never happened again. When Pat Jennings finally hung up his gloves at the age of 41, there were no regrets. "No. I'd been written off as a Tottenham Hotspur player at 32. So I didn't do so bad, did I?"

**Sue Mott**

**6.**

## **Friends reunited**

The years when Terry Neill and Don Howe took charge were lean ones in terms of trophies, but included the explosive 'Five-Minute Final' in 1979

# The Irish influence

So Bertie Mee was gone. Seventeenth place in the League, the lowest since the arrival of Herbert Chapman in 1925, had for the moment ensured Arsenal's safety. Although it was not apparent to many outsiders, the foundations were there for improvement, in the number of promising young players. In vain, the Club attempted to enlist Miljan Miljanic from Real Madrid and failed, and the successor for the new season, 1976/1977, ended up being Terry Neill. Neill had been in charge of rivals Tottenham Hotspur, but was hardly happy in his tenure there. His contract had a year to run, but he was at odds with Sidney Wale, the Spurs chairman, over many aspects of the administration. In his autobiography, *Revelations of a Football Manager*, Neill wrote: "The vacancy at Highbury had no bearing on what happened at White Hart Lane, I would have resigned whether the Arsenal post was vacant or not. When I joined Spurs, I harboured no thought of moving to another club and looked forward to serving them with dedication for the rest of my career."

Neill questioned whether it would be wise to return to take charge of a lot of players who had been at Arsenal with him when he was a player there. He had given 11 years' loyal service, starting in 1959, when he had joined them from Bangor as a 17-year-old wing half. He had played 241 League games, having switched to centre-half, ultimately surrendering his place to Frank McLintock. At the same time he had won 59 caps with Northern Ireland, latterly as player-manager. On leaving Highbury, he had tested his managerial potential as player-manager with Hull City before succeeding Bill Nicholson at Spurs at the age of 32. The Arsenal board were aware of his unrest – at a chance encounter with Ken Friar, their secretary, during a meeting of the Football League Executive Staffs' Association, Neill had said to Friar, in an unguarded moment: "I'm a bit fed up, if you want to know the truth, so bad I could jack it all in."

Arsenal made known their interest once the Miljanic deal fell through, notwithstanding that Alan Ball and other leading players at Highbury had lobbied to have Bobby Campbell, the coach, promoted to manager. Neill had by now informed Wale of his intention to leave and that, if they wished, they could sue him over breach of contract for his remaining year. In the meantime he met

Denis Hill-Wood and his "transfer" was agreed. He had made plain to Arsenal's chairman that there could be problems ahead. His self-confidence riding high, he looked forward to the challenge of possibly tricky man-management.

Neill's playing career had been a story of orderliness. Moving from grammar school to technical college in Northern Ireland, he had excelled in the drawing of engineering blueprints and had become an apprentice toolmaker. On arrival at Highbury, he had attended Regent Street Polytechnic to study shorthand and typing and classical guitar. Beside his managerial spells with Hull City and Spurs, he had earlier been chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association. He had been one of the first managers to make his team jog to the centre of the field before kick-off and salute the crowd, a gesture initiated by Herbert Chapman but virtually unknown elsewhere until the 1970s. Public relations at times could be his forte.

As is customary, he brought with him to Arsenal his number two from Spurs, Wilf Dixon, with Campbell departing shortly thereafter and his chief lobbyist, Ball, remaining only until Christmas. Ball joined Lawrie McMenemy's Southampton squad, then FA Cup holders, for £60,000. A replacement was also needed urgently for Brian Kidd, who had left for Manchester City shortly before Neill took charge. A cloak-and-dagger pursuit of Malcolm Macdonald, Fulham-born idol of Newcastle United, ensued, with Neill having to stalk an evasive Lord Westwood, Newcastle's chairman, to ensure the deal went through. Gordon Lee, Newcastle's manager, had strangely agreed to release Macdonald following an internal dispute.

Macdonald was an iconic figure, rumbustuous on and off the field, a striker who hurled himself at defences like the Flying Scotsman. His idiosyncratic nature meant that he gained only 14 England caps, yet he was hailed wherever he went. With Newcastle, he scored 95 goals in 187 League matches and 14 in 23 FA Cup games. He added a further 42 in 84 League games with Arsenal plus 10 goals in nine FA Cup games. His final tally was 191 in 372 League and Cup matches. "I was hugely impressed with the professionalism of the place," Macdonald recalled of his days at Highbury. "I didn't go there to learn, but to supply a service and there was an interesting mix of youth and experience: Ball, Armstrong and Simpson alongside Brady, O'Leary, Rix and others coming through. And when you've got a lot of kids, performances go up and down to ridiculous proportions. In my first match we lost to promoted Bradford City. Throughout the pre-season training I had played with Frank [Stapleton], a raw-boned lad but conspicuous in his desire to win. John Radford was not on the pre-season tour because his son was ill, and I was really excited about playing with Frank. Then, no Stapleton on the Bradford teamsheet, Radford instead. As John

admitted to me: 'Thee and me can't play together'. We were wholly ill-suited, our styles were confusing; we'd regularly get caught offside, which meant that we both stopped making runs. If you had Radford, you had to play to him. John soon left for West Ham United. Frank and I never looked back. We finished with 46 goals between us in three competitions, it just got better and better. He was a quiet, thoughtful Irishman, who needed to be goaded, and his development was wonderful to watch. For two seasons I was able to play just how I saw the game, and grabbed about 60 goals before I did my knee in against Rotherham United in the League Cup. It was a great Club, and I had a fabulous time."

By the end of the season, there were only two players remaining from the Double team – Pat Rice and George Armstrong. Terry Mancini had left for Fulham, Eddie Kelly for Queens Park Rangers, Alex Cropley for Aston Villa and Peter Storey to Fulham. Nevertheless, a respectable eighth place was achieved in the League. Alan Hudson, a gifted playmaker, was signed from Stoke City for £200,000 as a replacement for Ball, while the captaincy had been handed to Rice, who was to earn the enviable distinction of making five FA Cup final appearances.

During a summer tour of the Far East, prior to the 1977/1978 season, Neill frustratingly learned via telex that Dave Sexton, then busy with QPR, would be unable to join him as coach at Highbury, having accepted the manager's job with Manchester United, following the sacking of Tommy Docherty. Neill was bitterly disappointed, having reached a verbal agreement with Sexton, but could not understand his priorities and instead turned to former playing colleague and coach Don Howe, then engaged at Leeds. "I believe football teams are made on the training pitch," Neill reflected. "Don and I worked as hard cop and soft cop interrogating the suspect. He was the hard man who put the players under pressure. I was the soft one who tended to be more easygoing. Within football, managers and coaches tend not to trust players too much. There is a saying that they'll pinch the milk out of your tea. Players will seek to take advantage, and in days of high wages it is not so easy to maintain levels of discipline."

On that score, Neill had just sent home from Australia both Macdonald and Hudson for misbehaviour, and when he got home himself he warned his chairman that there were difficult decisions to be taken and "I'm not going to be the most popular guy around here". On the up side, however, came a coup, the signing of Pat Jennings from Spurs for a comparatively piffling £45,000. Jimmy Rimmer had given good service in goal for three years and now departed for Aston Villa, with whom he would win the 1981 League title and the 1982 European Cup. In Jennings, Neill had engaged one of the best keepers of all time and Keith Burkinshaw would subsequently admit his error in allowing Jennings

to leave, erroneously supposing his career was in decline at 32.

A further addition was Alan Sunderland, signed from Wolverhampton Wanderers for £220,000. Here was a striker who would give Arsenal one of their finest moments, yet cause his manager repeated anxieties. Even before the end of his first season he demanded a transfer, being dissatisfied with his wages.

The flourish that would characterise Neill's reign at Highbury was soon evident this season, when Manchester United were beaten in the opening round of the League Cup with goals from Macdonald (2) and Brady. With Brady maturing early and young Graham Rix, Doncaster-born from a Yorkshire Schools' XI, emerging as a credible replacement for the departed Armstrong on the left flank, Arsenal's prospects looked bright. They were further improved by the development of Stapleton. With his tireless, selfless running, he was proving an able partner for Macdonald, and by the turn of the year a belated recapture of the League title was a possibility. On December 27, they beat West Bromwich Albion 3-1 at the Hawthorns, with Brady and Rix in mesmerising form.

In the League Cup, Southampton and Hull went the same way as Manchester United, and Manchester City lay in their path in the quarterfinal. Five incredible saves by Pat Jennings at Maine Road kept them in the hunt, with Dennis Tueart and Peter Barnes running riot for City. Opposing keeper Joe Corrigan reflected: "They say goalkeepers only start maturing at 28. Pat is 35, and still maturing." Victory in the replay at Highbury, in front of a crowd of 57,748, came through a disputed penalty which City's manager Tony Book described as "diabolical". Hudson, however, had given Arsenal an edge with one of his finer performances. The semi-final against Liverpool, over two legs, hung by a thread. A goal by Ray Kennedy, playing against his former club, gave Liverpool a 2-1 lead at home and, back at Highbury, with Stapleton scoring inviting chances and Ray Clemence outstanding in Liverpool's goal, Arsenal couldn't break the deadlock. Four days after that League Cup exit, Arsenal walloped Walsall 4-1 in the FA Cup, then edged a tight sixth round away to Wrexham by the odd goal in five. In the semi-final an optimistic Leyton Orient proved no match.

Next came Ipswich and, against the odds, they would defeat Arsenal at Wembley by the only goal of the game, the same score with which they had won at home in the opening League game of the season. This was the Ipswich era of Bobby Robson, who on a low budget had built a thrusting, intelligent side. "I was nervous about my first Cup Final as a manager," Neill recalls. "If the manager admits he's nervous, it can be communicated to the players, though by the end of this season Don and I felt things were about to happen." At Wembley, they did not. It was a one-goal slaughter for Ipswich, and it was small consolation that Arsenal managed to finish fifth in the League, behind



Nottingham Forest.

Neill and Howe had doubts about the spine of the team: Young, Hudson and Macdonald. Most pressing was the state of Macdonald's knee. The 1978/1979 season maintained the emphasis on the ability of Neill's teams in cup competitions rather than the League (where they slipped two places to seventh). Having been eliminated from the League Cup on their first outing, against Rotherham United, the season was primarily about their fortunes in the FA Cup and a by-now renamed UEFA Cup. Macdonald made only a handful of appearances; his knee never properly mending after three operations, so Neill allowed him to join Djurgarden in Sweden during the summer of 1979. However, osteoarthritis had set in and Macdonald was obliged to announce his retirement in August, aged only 29.

The UEFA Cup campaign began at home to FC Lokomotiv Leipzig. Alan Sunderland had become the established partner for Stapleton, and the two of them scored six of the seven goals – two and four respectively – over the two legs. The next hurdle was more arduous. Hajduk Split, a northern Croatian town which was then still part of Yugoslavia, won the first leg at home 2-1. Brady's away goal was crucial in carrying them through after they won the return with the only goal from Willie Young, who defied his reputation as a no-nonsense stopper by delicately chipping over the goalkeeper. In a physical contest, Brady and his close marker were sent off, so that for the third round, returning to Yugoslavia to face Red Star of Belgrade, Brady was absent. This was perhaps decisive in a single-goal defeat, and Arsenal could not turn the tie around at home, managing only a 1-1 draw. Neill, aware that Brady was determined to move abroad at the end of the season, was attracted by the pace and technique of Vladimir Petrovic in Red Star's attack, but nothing came of that for now.

The FA Cup lay ahead. And how! It took four replays, the five matches stretching from January 6 to January 22, before Arsenal squeezed home 2-0 against Sheffield Wednesday at Filbert Street. The 540 minutes of football were watched by 143,996 fans. It was almost a Test series so it was fitting that it was the brother of a Test cricketer, Steve Gattling, who broke the deadlock. Two days after the first replay, Neill signed one of the Ipswich Town players who had destroyed his side in the previous year's final, Brian Talbot, for a £450,000 fee. His debut came in the home defeat of Notts County in the fourth round. Less easy was a fifth-round confrontation with Nottingham Forest on their own ground. A lone goal from Stapleton inflicted a first home defeat on Forest in 52 matches. Southampton were overcome in the sixth round after a replay; Stapleton and Sunderland hit the winning semi-final goals against a Wolverhampton Wanderers team battling to avoid relegation.

The concluding FA Cup tie of 1979 against Manchester United has become known as the 'Five-Minute Final'. For much of the game it seemed that Arsenal had one hand on the trophy. Twenty minutes from time, Arsenal replaced David Price in midfield with Steve Walford, Price having begun to fade. Whatever the intention, Arsenal lost some of their balance and, with four minutes remaining, Gordon McQueen, United's central defender, surged into attack to reduce the margin. Two minutes on, and Sammy McIlroy had levelled the score. Now the tide was with United, and most would have expected them to ride their momentum into extra time and on to victory. But then came a dramatic winning goal as Brady shimmied into United's half, found Rix wide on the left, and his dipping cross to Sunderland at the far post was sealed with a close-range goal. United and their supporters were left disbelieving and distraught.

Knowing that the Club had only one further season in which to enjoy and exploit the talents of Liam Brady was sobering for Terry Neill as he contemplated 1979/1980, though this would arguably be his finest year. Arsenal finished fourth in the League behind Liverpool, were back at Wembley yet again in the FA Cup – though they lost to West Ham – and reached the final of the Cup Winners' Cup, where they lost 4-5 on penalties to Valencia in Brussels. Watching Brady at this time was a real joy, for he had become one of the world's finest players. He rejected all offers of improved terms, not as a result of disenchantment at Highbury, but because he was curious to discover the range of his talents in a foreign environment, to see whether he could adapt to different patterns of the game. In desperate pursuit of alternatives, Neill contemplated the possibility of luring to Highbury the likes of Frank Arnesen, Michel Platini, Zbigniew Boniek, Johan Neeskens, Johan Cruyff and Diego Maradona – all without success.

In the event, Arsenal went out of the League Cup after four rounds, three of these matches, against Leeds United, Brighton and Hove Albion and Swindon Town, requiring replays. The only easy rides were the first-round replay against Leeds at home, when Don Revie put out a weakened team, and the home replay with Brighton, when teenager Paul Vaessen scored his first two goals for the senior side. What looked like easy opposition in Swindon proved an illusion, thanks to own goals by Steve Walford and John Hollins in the replay.

By this stage, December 11, Arsenal had already progressed through two rounds of the Cup Winners' Cup, relatively comfortable winners against Fenerbahçe, of Turkey, and FC Magdeburg, of East Germany. What was about to prove another long haul in the FA Cup lay immediately ahead with an opening visit to Cardiff City. There was every reason for confidence on all fronts, an impressive goalless draw in the League at Highbury against the redoubtable

Liverpool having confirmed the equilibrium of Neill's team. In the event, it required a replay against Cardiff, with two goals by Sunderland at home doing the trick and, after Brighton had been eliminated, another replay was needed, this time at home to Bolton, when Sunderland again scored a pair and Stapleton one. Watford were defeated away in the sixth round, resulting in a semi-final against Liverpool. This was to be another marathon, the tie extending to four matches, each one as tight as a drumskin: goalless at Hillsborough, twice 1-1 at Villa Park and finally 1-0 to Arsenal, through Brian Talbot, at Highfield Road, Coventry.

Arsenal were viewed as a mix of the beautiful and the boring, Don Howe's offside tactics antagonising many neutral spectators, not to say opponents. Yet there was no denying the skills of the two strikers, of Brady, Talbot and Rix in midfield, or O'Leary in the heart of defence, with the powerful Willie Young as his colleague. This semi-final saw one of the classic midfield duels, between Brady and Graham Souness; in the latter part of the second half, Arsenal had had to defend vigorously, O'Leary needing to call on every resource to block Kenny Dalglish. When the teams met a fourth time, however, it was Liverpool's errors that decided the outcome on a hard, dusty pitch. Two miskicks led directly to Talbot's winner in the 13th minute. Ray Kennedy, Terry McDermot and young Sammy Lee had lost their rhythm, though Liverpool recovered two days later to take the two points off Aston Villa which they needed to retain their League title.

Three days prior to the first encounter with Liverpool, Arsenal had been held 1-1 at home by Juventus in the Cup Winners' Cup semi-final first leg. In a rough match, O'Leary was nobbled by Roberto Bettega, but justice was done when Bettega put through his own net. The return leg in Turin was squeezed between the second and third Liverpool games, and it was 18-year-old Vaessen, on as a substitute for Price, who headed the only goal to see Arsenal through to their second European final, to face Valencia. Sadly, it was the high point of Vaessen's career, a subsequent knee injury forcing early retirement.

Before that, however, in these crowded, demanding days and hours, Arsenal had to face West Ham United at Wembley. Though the occasion was less than memorable for Arsenal, losing to the only goal by Trevor Brooking after 13 minutes – a rare header – it was a special occasion for Paul Allen, who at 17 years and 256 days became the youngest-ever player in a Wembley final, robbing Everton's Howard Kendal of the record. Neill was a gracious loser, refusing to blame fatigue from the semi-final marathon, but Arsenal were effectively obliged to admit that West Ham had outwitted them in the middle of the field. "It was a boiling hot day," Brady recalls, "and they got an early goal, just sat back, and we found it difficult to break them down." Talbot, ever-present

in the 70 games that season, gave so much in midfield that he collapsed with exhaustion on the coach leaving the stadium.

Four days later and it was off to Brussels to meet Valencia. Drawing on reserves of stamina and courage, they stalled formidable opponents, managed by the legendary Alfredo di Stefano and including the likes of Mario Kempes, Argentina's World Cup winner, and Rainer Bonhof, of West Germany. A superb O'Leary shackled Kempes, and the game remained goalless after extra time. Both Kempes and Brady failed in the penalty shoot-out and, at 5-4 to Valencia, their goalkeeper Pereira thwarted Graham Rix with the final kick of the match. Rix was consumed with guilt, never mind the consoling embraces of his colleagues, including Neill. "You're one of the most important people who got us here," the manager told him. "We haven't won anything, but it's still the greatest season we've had." With two League matches still to complete, Arsenal managed to win away to Wolves, but then collapsed after a journey north to Middlesbrough, a five-goal defeat leaving them in fourth place and outside UEFA Cup qualification for the following season.

A strange transfer heralded the start of the 1980/1981 season, Arsenal paying a million pounds for Clive Allen from Queens Park Rangers, and transferring him only two months later to Crystal Palace without having played him in a single first-team game. It was rumoured that Jim Gregory, the QPR chairman, had refused to sell him to Palace, though that is where he then went in exchange for the England leftback Kenny Sansom, together with a further £355,000 balance, the value placed on Arsenal's reserve keeper Paul Barron, who joined Allen at Palace. Neill is categorical that Allen was bought, with Hill-Wood's full approval, to avoid paying £400,000 corporation tax on a profitable year, and that he swiftly discovered Allen's style was incompatible with Sunderland and Stapleton. Whatever the merits Sansom might bring at fullback, there was no escaping the gaping hole left in the team by the departure of Brady. As Neill admitted: "It was an enormous loss for the Club. No one can know the agonies I went through travelling in search of an adequate replacement." Disappearing from the FA Cup at the first hurdle – well beaten at Everton – and from the League Cup, eliminated at Spurs of all places, Arsenal were left to concentrate on the League. In spite of Stapleton's 14 goals from 40 league matches, Arsenal could improve only one place on the previous season's third. Why the relative League failure against a parallel run of Cup success?

"It's down to me," Neill admits 25 years on. "I was the leader, the front man, and it was my fault. I find it the worst thing, in government, politics and even sport nowadays, everyone wants to deflect the blame. One of the problems for managers, I think, is that there is a hangover of issues from one season to the

next, you're seldom fresh, you don't get time between one season and the next to get a rest. When I arrived back at Highbury, it was fire-fighting at first, so having cup runs boosted morale. I realise with hindsight that I should have rested Liam, should have used Steve Gattin more. I don't think mentally I was up for the endurance factor of the League; you get distracted by the glamour of the cup. On top of that, in successive seasons when we were at our best, we were drained by a couple of cup marathons against Sheffield Wednesday and Liverpool. You were thrilled by these epics, but tend not to see the wider picture and, as manager, are left snatching at things, making wrong decisions. When Liam left, I was chasing Frank Arnesen, and got very close to signing him, but he went to Valencia. That's the way things go. Our best year, I think, was 1979/1980, when we did so much and achieved nothing – two cup finals and fourth in the League. When I took over, the players were used to a sergeant-major attitude, but when Don and I got together, we started shifting a lot more responsibility on to the players, to be self-determining. When the whistle goes, it's up to them, it's no use shouting from the touchline. But after 1981 I know that I started going downhill. I'd been at it almost 15 years. You ride the pressures, you love the challenge, but you don't realise what it takes out of you. In two instances, I succeeded very successful previous managers, Bill Nicholson and Bertie Mee, and was managing some players I'd been contemporary with. It's so easy looking back, and I don't let it burden me now. There is no shame in failing. The only shame is in failing to have a go."

Contemplating the 1981/1982 season, with Frank Stapleton having departed on a free contract to Manchester United, Neill made moves to sign both Tony Woodcock, England's World Cup striker, from Cologne, and Yugoslav captain Vladimir Petrovic, but neither transfer initially materialised. Lean years were lying in wait as attendances declined from an average of 36,371 in 1978/1979 to 28,116 in 1983/1984. Neill was beset with problems on all fronts: during the 1981/1982 pre-season, Alan Sunderland was involved in a car accident in which two people died, though he was cleared of negligence. By October Arsenal's record of being the only First Division club never relegated was under threat. They stumbled to a 0-2 defeat away to promoted Swansea City, whose manager John Toshack had lifted his home town to second in the table at that stage, behind Ipswich. With Spurs and West Ham lying third and fourth, embarrassment at Highbury was deepening, but a run of seven wins in eight games steadied the ship. Cup hopes, however, were sunk first by Liverpool, in a fourthround replay in the League Cup, then by Spurs at the first hurdle in the FA Cup, and thirdly by KFC Winterslag, of Switzerland, in the second round of the UEFA Cup. An inadequate 11 goals in 38 matches came from Sunderland, and

nine in 39 from Rix in midfield. A final fifth place in the table was well short of Arsenal's ambitions. Off the field, the Club's air of benign equilibrium wobbled with the death in the new year of chairman Denis Hill-Wood at the age of 76, after 22 years at the helm. His son Peter succeeded him.

Although Cup fortunes flourished again the following season, League performances slumped further, Arsenal finishing 10th behind Liverpool. The arrival of Woodcock, with 14 goals in 34 games, provided some uplift, but Petrovic, also signed by now, proved a disappointment with two goals in 13 appearances. Perversely, the team played some of its best football in the opening round of the UEFA Cup, in spite of going down both home and away to Spartak of Moscow, 3-2 in the Lenin Stadium and 5-2 at Highbury. Such was the co-ordination of the Soviets at Highbury that they received a standing ovation at the finish. In the two domestic cups, Manchester United each time inflicted the damage, winning home and away in the so-called Milk Cup (as the League Cup was then known) and 2-1 at Villa Park in an FA Cup semi-final.

The 1983/1984 season was to see only marginal improvement, despite Neill beating Manchester United and Liverpool to the signing of the gifted Charlie Nicholas from Celtic for £650,000. Nicholas opted for Highbury on the basis of his agent calculating that off-the-field earnings would be higher in the capital. Nicholas was certainly a tonic, scoring 11 goals in 41 League appearances, and regularly delighting the crowd. He certainly made a difference to Arsenal's earnings, with attendances rising by 4,000. Team morale, however, was compromised by outbursts from Alan Sunderland, and in Neill's words, "in the end we had to give him a free transfer – that was the only way the Club could dispense with his services". In his last halfseason, Sunderland scored only four times in 12 appearances. Another signing, Lee Chapman, an England Under-21 striker from Stoke, proved less successful, with one goal in four games, and by mid-term Neill had gone, as the board panicked.

The countdown to Neill's dismissal had that air of inevitability that comes to haunt managers. November had brought three defeats in four matches, against Sunderland, Ipswich Town and Leicester City. The final straw was the exit from the Milk Cup at home to Walsall on November 29. Omens had hung in the air. Nicholas, for all his talents, had yet to score. Declining Club finances had produced cutbacks which at times seemed trivial – for example, an announcement of no free turkeys at Christmas. Neill's players were no longer listening, either to him or, it seemed, to Don Howe. Wrath on the terraces was, as so often, directed at the manager. Half a century on from their famous FA Cup upset, Third Division Walsall had done it again, and further League defeats at home to WBA and away to West Ham sealed the inevitable.

A telephone call on December 15 from Ken Friar, the general secretary, contained that deadening message: "Oh, by the way, the chairman would like to see you at 9am tomorrow." Neill did not need to ask why. Hill-Wood, a caring man, confessed to not having slept for three nights before making the decision. Don Howe was appointed, initially as caretaker, ultimately as successor. Amid the crisis, Neill predicted that Arsenal would finish sixth in the table, and this would prove to be correct. To this day, Neill is defensive of Howe's reputation. "Don has been maligned by some who label him a defensive coach," Neill says. "But I can say that in all my time working with him, his ratio of work between attack and defence was very heavily in favour of attack."

It had been a sign of the weakening position of both Neill and Howe that when their contracts were renewed before the start of the season, the directors insisted that Howe move to London from Wolverhampton. Howe had been commuting daily down the M6/M1 to the training ground at London Colney. Becoming manager, this would, of course, have become impractical. Howe's first action was to sign England striker Paul Mariner for £200,000 from Ipswich Town. The new partnership of Woodcock and Mariner, bristling with goals, was the basis of the team's climb up the table. Mariner scored seven times in his 15 games, against 21 by Woodcock in 37. Arsenal's 74 goals in sixth place was one better than the champions, Liverpool, but their goals conceded, 60, was almost twice as many. Among the players, at least one bore no criticism of Neill. Brian Talbot was grateful not merely because Neill brought him to Highbury. "I always thought he did his best," Talbot said. "Terry brought in a fantastic coach, Don Howe. In my opinion, he was the best in the country. You shouldn't judge the manager as a coach. Terry was a good front man, good with the press, good with the board ... he could smooth things out all round, and was good with family problems ... If I had a disappointment, it was that we never won the Championship. We had a good side at the time, but I always felt Terry was one player short, on the right side."

A relatively bright start for Howe was not to be sustained in the 1984/1985 campaign. The team slid from sixth place to seventh in the League and did nothing of note in cup competitions, losing to Second Division Oxford United in the League Cup and to Fourth Division York City in the FA Cup. By Christmas, attendances below 20,000 were uncomfortably frequent. The following season, 1985/1986, saw celebration of the Club's centenary, but without anything serious to shout about on the pitch. Another seventh position was achieved and, within a changing team, Paul Davis and David Rocastle were making their mark. The lofty Niall Quinn had joined the attack and, with Nicholas scoring freely, the team reached the quarter-finals of the Milk Cup, only to fall 2-1 at home in the

replay against Aston Villa. They likewise lost an FA Cup fifth-round second replay away to Luton Town. By any serious measurement, Arsenal were now no more than an ordinary side. Howe felt circumstances were turning against him, and was doubting whether his contract would be renewed at the end of the season. His mind was made up during the replay at Luton when, with a second replay looking probable, he discovered that a toss-up for choice of venue had taken place in the boardroom without his being informed. Two weeks later, having beaten Coventry City at home for a fourth consecutive victory, Howe asked to be released from his contract.

At the end of the season, the Club announced that, for the eighth time, they were appointing a former employee as successor, George Graham, for the past four years manager of Millwall. The Terry Neill/Don Howe era was at an end.

**David Miller**



## INTERVIEW

# **The magician**

**Liam Brady possessed genius in his left foot, taking the Club to four cup finals in seven years before opting to try his luck in Italy, and a fresh challenge with Juventus**

When Liam Brady strides into the room, it seems like nothing has changed. Yes, the hair might be a little thinner, the temples flecked with grey and the waistline slightly thicker, but within that frame you can still see the boy who went on to become a legend at Highbury. To any Arsenal fan of a certain age, the walk is unmistakable. So is the look in those stubborn blue eyes; the same look that accompanied a determined young lad crossing the Irish Sea in 1971 to begin a career that turned into solid gold.

This was the boy who developed into a topclass performer of impish grace, who could slide past opponents with a wriggle and a shrug before putting that fabled left peg to devastating use. A raking pass or swerving shot – you never knew what to expect with Brady on the ball.

As one of the most inventive players ever to represent Arsenal, a beautifully balanced midfielder of the highest order, Brady reached levels beyond the grasp of most. Over the course of seven seasons at Highbury, those standards proved more than enough to leave an indelible mark, an enduring reminder of his prodigious talent. Something akin to genius adhered to Brady. It was unmistakable: the innate confidence and composure of someone who knew he possessed a very special gift.

With his scrawny appearance belying a strong, wiry frame that was supported by powerful legs, Brady's technical skills could overshadow proceedings and dominate a match. Opponents might think they had him cornered, that he had nowhere to go, only to see their elusive adversary emerge the other side with the ball at his feet, sizing up his next move with a razorsharp mind. It is generally accepted, in fact, that this slightly built Irishman with the magical left foot stood out as the most creative player ever to wear the red and white. Only when Dennis Bergkamp turned up did that title receive a legitimate challenge.

Back in 1974, however, formidable reputations had still to be earned. With 13 appearances to his name from a breakthrough season, the 18- year-old returned home to Ireland feeling pretty pleased with himself. In fact, the youth-team graduate's first League goal for the Club, an equaliser against Queens Park Rangers in the last game of the season, would have been the icing on the cake had it not come as a result of Alan Ball's broken leg. Then Brady heard what had

been going on behind his back: the Republic of Ireland manager, Johnny Giles, had asked the Arsenal manager, Bertie Mee, if the young prospect could take part in a three-match tour of South America. Mee said no, feeling it wouldn't be in the best interests of a lad who had endured a hard debut season. International recognition, Mee surmised, would come soon enough. On reporting back to London for pre-season training, Brady found out what had happened during the course of a routine meeting with his manager. "I didn't think it was right that he should prevent me from playing for my country," Brady says calmly now as he thinks back to the scene. "I felt I had right on my side."

More than anything, the youngster was incensed that he hadn't even been consulted. Flying into a rage, he gave Mee a piece of his mind, only to be put firmly in his place. "I got pretty short shrift. 'I'm the manager, get out!', that type of thing." Brady recalls the incident now with a smile. Many years have passed since he flew off the handle, but it is important to remember the circumstances back then. Only a teenager at the time, Brady carried very little clout. Bawling at Mee, a strict disciplinarian who didn't take kindly to what he would have considered insubordination, must have been a huge risk. When I put this to Brady, he shrugs it off. "You've got to stand up for what you believe, haven't you?" Typical Brady. If he feels wronged, he will stick by his guns, irrespective of the possible consequences.

It was a similar story a few years before when he was expelled from St Aidan's Christian Brothers School in Dublin for captaining Ireland Schoolboys against the express wishes of the head brother, who wanted him to play instead in a school Gaelic football match. With his exams coming up, it was an extremely tough call, but, encouraged by his father, he went off to Wales for the international believing he had right on his side. The argument caused quite a stir, with the front page of Dublin's *Evening Herald* proclaiming 'Christian Brother Expels Boy for Playing Soccer'. Arrangements were made to study for his exams at another school. Though terribly upset, young Liam was totally unrepentant. He later explained his feelings in his 1980 book, *So Far So Good*: "Even if the brother changed his mind and allowed me back, I would not have gone," he wrote. "It was a matter of principle and that brother had shown me his true colours."

Here, then, we have two small examples of this character's outlook. Whatever his age or experience, the determined Dubliner certainly knew his own mind. It was to prove a useful attribute in the years to come as he set about establishing himself in Arsenal's first team – an outfit that wasn't in the best of shape when Brady first emerged from the lower ranks.

Sat at a table in a side room of Arsenal's Shenley training ground, the Club's

Head of Youth Development dredges the memory banks. "We were in the bottom half of the First Division, but it was funny; there was no chaos or crisis, or anything like that," he says. "There wasn't the kind of pressure there is on players nowadays. Bertie wanted to blood young players and the press and supporters gave you time. Back then it was alright for us to have two or three seasons in the doldrums because we were pushing the kids on. It did bear fruit in the late 70s when we started to become a very good side."

As mentioned earlier, Brady was fortunate to have the immensely talented Alan Ball as an example to follow. And while one newspaper described the pairing as 'The Sorcerer and his Apprentice', it was obvious that the apprentice was learning the ropes pretty fast. As a fellow midfielder, the World Cup winner taught his eager pupil the meaning of one-touch football, of swift pass and movement, of dictating a game by his commanding presence alone. "Alan was a big influence," Brady confirms. "He wasn't popular with everyone in the dressing room – some thought he was flash – but I would have said he had lots of personality. He was a great player for Arsenal. I think people forget that because he played at a time when the Club wasn't doing particularly well." The atmosphere in the dressing room could certainly have been better, however. Charlie George was just one who had grown disillusioned after his Double heroics.

By this time, Mee had departed, to be succeeded by Terry Neill, the smooth-talking Northern Irishman returning to the club he had represented as a player several years before. Neill endured a highly uncomfortable first season at Highbury in trying to sort out the wheat from the disruptive chaff and, as big names began heading out the exit door, John Radford and Alan Ball among them, Brady seriously considered his own position. Yet when people he had grown up with in the youth system, such as Frank Stapleton and David O'Leary, started seeing more action and new signings such as Malcolm Macdonald began to bear fruit, Brady settled down in a happier frame of mind. "As a midfield player, I was learning how to score more goals, and the positions to take up. As you get more experienced you learn when to arrive in the box, how to make a forward run. I started taking penalties too, having managed to get Malcolm off them. He didn't like it much, but the lads were with me because Malcolm had missed so many!"

Prompting from the sideline and on the training ground every day stood the talented Don Howe, who had rejoined the fold after departing in 1971 to manage West Bromwich Albion. The reunion would prove to be a significant move since the West Midlander was a coach of the utmost ability. "He understood the demands of every position," Brady explains. "He could have been a goalkeeping

coach if he'd wanted to. He could pinpoint anyone's weaknesses, saying you could be better if you did this or that. It was the same for me. He was always getting on to me about the defensive side of my game, which I know I wasn't too great at."

That led to a disagreement soon after Howe returned. To his disgust, Brady was substituted at Ipswich in the opening game of the 1977/1978 season. "Yeah, I wasn't very happy about that. I think that was an authority thing. He wanted to show everyone who was boss. I must admit, I did have a few run-ins with Don. Big run-ins. Sometimes he'd single me out when having a go at the team. I walked out of one meeting. 'See you tomorrow,' I said. I don't think he'd seen that before. Everyone would normally sit and take it."

At the end of that campaign, Ipswich Town figured heavily once more in Brady's life and the memories this time around weren't any better. A few weeks before the Cup Final, Brady was carried off at Liverpool with damaged ankle ligaments, but declared himself fit, a decision that denied his good friend Graham Rix a place in the Cup Final side. "I shouldn't have played. The team would have been stronger if Rixy had played. I will never forget the look on his face when he realised that he wasn't playing. He'd been involved all the way in our Cup run and was 100 per cent fit, unlike some of us who played that day. But because I was a very important player for the team, Don and Terry left the decision to me. It was one of the biggest mistakes I've ever made. I always say to the kids here now 'if you're not right, don't play'."

But play Brady did. In a match eventually decided by Roger Osborne's goal, Arsenal's talisman, restricted by his sore ankle, couldn't get going at all and limped off in the second half. History records, of course, that Arsenal would return to Wembley 12 months later and this time the circumstances were infinitely happier, Brady having a hand in all three Arsenal goals in a never-to-be-forgotten 3-2 victory over Manchester United. A weaving run from left to right led to the first – for Brian Talbot – while an accurate right-footed cross that found Frank Stapleton's head proved that Brady was anything but a one-footed player. Two-nil up with four minutes to go, the contest was rapidly turning into a straightforward win when United struck back to set up a barnstorming finale featuring, yet again, the man they called 'Chippy'.

Straight from Arsenal's kick-off following Sammy McIlroy's equaliser, Brady carried the ball deep into United territory with nothing more ambitious on his mind than trying to waste time and see out the 90 minutes. "I was just thinking let's get it away from our end, let's get it up theirs. That equaliser had knocked us for six. We were out on our feet. I don't know, maybe it was meant to be. [Lou] Macari's chasing me, I rode a couple of tackles, and Rixy came on

the outside. When I slipped it into his path, he put in a lovely cross that Gary Bailey thought he might get. Luckily Sundry [Alan Sunderland] took a chance that the keeper wasn't going to get it."

Bailey didn't make it and left himself stranded as Sunderland slid the ball home before ecstatically wheeling away having notched one of the most famous goals in FA Cup history. Looking back now, Brady puts a realistic slant on overall events. "We hit them twice on counter-attacks, while they had a lot of the play but didn't really do anything until the last five minutes. Had the game stopped at 85 minutes, people would have said 'Oh, Arsenal did a job on United today, let them come on to them before hitting them on the break.' It would have been consigned to those that can't be remembered. It's nice because now it will always be remembered." An image survives to this day of Brady parading the Cup with a toothy grin, wearing a sweat-stained United shirt inside-out. "Wish I'd kept my own shirt now," he jokes. "Might be worth a few bob. Jimmy Nichol's got mine. Don't think I'd get a lot for his though!" Never mind. Brady had already picked up his fair share of accolades that season: 17 goals from midfield, an FA Cup winner's medal and a long string of outstanding displays. No wonder he was voted the PFA Player of the Year.

Then came the bombshell that rocked every Arsenal fan. Brady announced that the following season would be his last at Highbury. He had decided that he wanted to try his luck at playing abroad, more for the purposes of broadening his football education than the obvious financial advantages on offer. It was an announcement that was to cause the player a lot of aggravation over the next 12 months, as pressure, rumour and suspicion followed him around, with supporters constantly imploring him to change his mind. "The Arsenal supporters didn't appreciate my decision at the time, but later on I think they could see it from my side. I'd told them what I was going to do and the fact I went abroad meant our relationship wasn't damaged.

"There was the money factor, of course. You could earn a lot more abroad then. But it wasn't so much that. It was the whole lifestyle thing. I remember Brian Moore doing a documentary about Kevin Keegan's life in Germany and that's when I was sold on the idea. I was going to get married anyway so we thought we'd do that and then just go – wherever it was."

As fate would have it, someone stepped in to steer him in a particular direction. "Over that period I began to be courted by a guy called Gigi Peronace, a gregarious little Italian. If you read books by the likes of Jimmy Greaves, Denis Law and Joe Baker, you'll find that Gigi was a very big player between Italy and England. A Mr Fixit. Probably an agent, but agents weren't supposed to exist at that time. Gigi would find out who the best players in England were and

become their friend; take them out, tell them about Italy. If you had kids, he'd buy them lovely presents, take you out for an Italian meal. All this was happening to me at that time. He had a beautiful house in Twickenham and I would be invited up for Sunday lunch with my girlfriend (now my wife). He didn't know which club I was going to join, but effectively he was selling me Italy. I'm sure he was doing the same to the likes of Bryan Robson and Ray Wilkins. He had great relationships with managers, directors, players. He knew everyone's name. He could charm the birds out of the trees."

Meanwhile, that 1979/1980 season was turning into a marathon effort as Arsenal made progress on four different fronts. As well as a sustained tilt at the title (which Liverpool eventually won), extended runs in the League Cup, FA Cup and European Cup Winners' Cup – the last two of which went all the way – set a formidable record. of 70 first-class games. No other English side in history had ever completed so many. By this time, reaching Wembley had developed into a pleasing habit. The showdown with West Ham United, however, turned into a washout. As with the Ipswich game, the Gunners never got going – still suffering, perhaps, from the effects of that draining semi-final – as their East London neighbours made off with the spoils thanks to Trevor Brooking's stooping header. By this stage, fixture congestion had long since become a serious problem. On the verge of their first European final for 10 years, Arsenal had been forced to play at Spurs a mere two days before their crucial Cup Winners' Cup semi-final first leg against Juventus. "There was a huge outcry before Spurs that we were going to field an under-strength team," Brady remembers. "Here's us trying to win a European trophy and the press are moaning about us picking a weak team two days before. We'd played on the Saturday as well, by the way. Funnily enough, Terry did put out a lot of fringe players and we still beat them. That's when Paul Davis made his debut."

Forty-eight hours later, Brady would imprint his ability on the consciousness of Juventus, his future employers, with the first of two outstanding performances in a bruising affair at Highbury when Marco Tardelli was sent off following several clumsy attempts to subdue his man. And so it was, after a heroic 1-0 win in Turin, that Brady accompanied his team-mates to Belgium for a final against Valencia that will partly be remembered for his uncharacteristic miss in the penalty shoot-out. "Over the 90 minutes we were the team that wanted to attack the most as they tried to catch us on the break. If we had just been a bit sharper we'd have beaten them. It was a hot, balmy night in Brussels and we'd lost the FA Cup Final a few days before in very hot conditions."

Extra time came and went with no break in the deadlock to set up the nerve-jangling ordeal from 12 yards out. When the great Mario Kempes missed



Valencia's first spot kick, Brady stepped up feeling quite buoyant. "I thought: 'We're in here'. I couldn't believe it when the keeper saved it. Brian Talbot came up next and kicked the ground but still scored. You wonder at those moments if Lady Luck's on your side."

It wasn't. Graham Rix's unfortunate miss put paid to any hopes of European glory. A season that had promised so much cruelly left the team with nothing to show for their backbreaking efforts. Brady, meanwhile, still didn't know where he would be playing his football the following season. "I had egg on my face because I wasn't going anywhere," he says. "Bayern Munich had said no. They had Paul Breitner in midfield and I wasn't what they wanted. Rixy and the boys were asking me in the dressing room where I was going. I had to put on a brave face, saying: 'Oh, you know, I've got a few offers.' But I didn't have any. I had to report back for pre-season training. Those were the rules. Then in the second week I got the call. Juventus had gone in for a couple of players they didn't get so they came for me. Gigi was in pole position. He took me to Italy.

"Football in England was struggling. There was a lot of violence in the game. People weren't going to matches. Italy, on the other hand, was the place to be. They were getting the best players in the world. Zico, Maradona, Socrates – all these guys were going to play in Italy." Serie A soon found out, what's more, that it had recruited a player worthy of keeping such company. Following two title-winning seasons at Juventus, the Republic of Ireland international went on to play with distinction for Sampdoria, Inter Milan and Ascoli in a five-year sojourn that more than vindicated his original decision. This was why he had left Arsenal in the first place: to escape familiarity, test his talent to the limit and experience another culture in a foreign land.

Returning his thoughts to the place that gave him his start, the place he calls home above all other clubs, Brady still wishes he could have signed off on a happier note. "I was sad the way it finished at Arsenal. It certainly didn't happen the way I would have wanted it to. We deserved more out of that last season than we got. But those days set me up. I learned a lot about life as I came through the ranks and made a name for myself in the first team. Sure, there were a few low points along the way, but all in all it was a great place to be. We built some very good teams and saw some success. In that respect, I couldn't have been at a better club."

And Arsenal, in truth, couldn't have asked for a more talented servant.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **Home from home**

**David O’Leary arrived at Arsenal from Dublin as a nervous 15-year-old. Twenty years and a record 722 appearances later, he had become one of the Club’s legendary figures**

David O’Leary stood at the top of the Wembley steps and held the FA Cup aloft. It was an emotional moment – rather strange, too – seeing as he would never again wear the famous red and white. After 20 incredible years, O’Leary was leaving Arsenal. As he lifted the old silver pot with a mixture of contentment and sorrow, generating warm applause from the massed ranks to his right, this one-club man tried to work out where the time had gone.

The fight to prove himself as a young apprentice, the constant pressure that came with playing for the first team, the disappointment, the joy, the tribulations and trophies – it all seemed to have passed in a flash since that hazy day long ago when a 15-year-old hopeful came across from Dublin. The day after that win over Sheffield Wednesday in 1993, this faithful centre-half went back to Highbury to tie up some loose ends, say a few goodbyes, give his thanks and best wishes to those people behind the scenes who had seen him grow up. You build some strong bonds over the course of two decades. It was like leaving his family all over again. In-between the kisses and handshakes, a photographer asked if David would like a keepsake, a final snap to record his time at the Club. Up they went to the stand, to the directors’ box entrance, where the Irishman was captured surveying a familiar scene.

That photo remains to this day in O’Leary’s personal collection, which must go down as one of the most comprehensive anthologies of any footballer. Every chapter is covered at home on the walls of a dedicated room. Sixty-eight caps for the Republic of Ireland are proudly reflected, as are his managerial spells at Leeds and Aston Villa. Yet by far the biggest swathe of photos and mementos concern the time spent in the bosom of his first love: the first awkward meeting with Liam Brady and Frank Stapleton (fellow Irish lads already on Arsenal’s books), a beaming pose with the great Pele at Highbury, a tearful embrace with his dad after winning the title at Anfield. It’s all there. You can hardly see the wallpaper for this library of memories. And no wonder – 722 first-class games take some chronicling. Hundreds of players came and went, so too a few managers, during the Club’s record appearance holder’s Arsenal career.

And like so many great adventures, it began far away from the glare of the flashbulb. Met at Heathrow Airport for the start of a threeyear apprenticeship, the teenager was taken to his digs in High Barnet. "That’s when the

homesickness set in," he says. "I realised that this was it. There was no going back now."

Not for this determined lad anyway. John Murphy, another Irish boy who had come across at the same time (he also appeared in that photo with Brady and Stapleton), went home within a few months to leave O'Leary alone. The doubts returned, and it didn't help that the task of cutting the mustard as a footballer wasn't proving easy at all. With the standard much higher than he had previously encountered, the captain of Ireland schoolboys was quickly realising that he had a long way to go.

Ian Crawford, the straight-talking youth team manager, certainly wouldn't shirk from pointing out where the trainee was going wrong and that advice also extended to his appearance. Crawford had a quiet word on the youngster's very first day. O'Leary recalls the moment quite clearly. "He said: 'Look, we finish about three. You've got plenty of time after that to go and get your hair cut'." Taking the hint, O'Leary walked up to Barnet to have his first trim in England – 'a good short back and sides'.

That first year at Highbury brought plenty of challenges. As well as improving his football, it introduced O'Leary to all manner of jobs, one of the most important ones being looking after the away-team dressing room on matchdays. Once the visiting team had got changed and departed, it fell to O'Leary, along with the other apprentices, to clean up. "I remember Barcelona coming over for Geordie Armstrong's testimonial. I was hosing down the dressing room afterwards and one of their players was left in there. It was Johan Cruyff. He started talking to me, asking how I was getting on and that. I couldn't believe it. I went home and rang my parents straight away to tell them what had happened."

After Barnet, he moved to digs in Enfield where, for the next six years, Jack and Pam Lewis would look after him royally. Whenever he got back late from night matches at Highbury, a plate of sandwiches would be waiting for the hungry youngster. It was a comforting environment which provided a solid base for him. From those digs, the journeys into work still stick in the mind. "I'd be standing at the bus stop outside Highlands Hospital and you'd see the first-team players driving by in their nice cars. Ricey [Pat Rice] would sometimes stop to give me a lift. Geordie Armstrong was the same. They'd take me into Southgate where I'd catch the coach into training."

Everyone has to start somewhere and for 'Paddy' it was a nondescript goalless draw at Burnley on the opening day of the 1975/1976 season. An injury to Peter Simpson had elicited a call-up for a nervous 17-year-old whose only previous first-team experience was a run-out in a testimonial at Reading.

Nevertheless, the rookie coped pretty well that afternoon at Turf Moor, next to a very helpful partner in Terry Mancini. The day was complete when the manager produced a surprise. "Bertie Mee came into the dressing room afterwards and said that there was someone he thought I'd like to see. It was my dad. Arsenal had flown him over. I couldn't believe it. I was so pleased that he was there to see my debut.

"Bertie was clever with me that year," O'Leary remembers. "I'd come in on a Monday and they might not let me train till Wednesday – send me off for a jog with Fred Street or something."

At this early stage, he was still getting changed with his mates rather than with the first team. If training was at Highbury, his kit could still be found in the away-team dressing room where the youth and reserve teams were traditionally placed rather than further up the corridor in the home quarters. The colour of his training kit differed as well. He was still wearing a blue tracksuit top rather than the red of the seniors. Come matchdays, however, he was expected to act like a man, to look after himself, which wasn't always easy against some seasoned tough nuts. "I remember going up to play Birmingham City and their front line was Kenny Burns, Bob Hatton and Peter Withe. They absolutely knocked seven bells out of me. I remember getting whacked across the head by Withe, who then said: 'Oh, sorry, are you alright son?' What a nice bloke, I thought. Then he did it again about a minute later." As with any young pro, such bruising battles represented a test, one that had to be passed if you were going to progress. He must have done so because he was summoned to the manager's office. "Bertie called me in at the end of that season and said: 'You've done OK and I think we're going to give you a new contract.' Done OK? I'd played 30 games for the first team at the age of 17. But that was Bertie's manner. He didn't like dishing out too much praise. He was very understated."

By the same token, O'Leary was extremely ambitious in his own quiet way and raised a few eyebrows during that first season by keeping his place in the side even when Simpson returned. Though no one could know it at the time, a trend had been set. For the next 12 years, this eternally consistent defender would hardly miss a game.

Memorably, three of his subsequent matches turned out to be FA Cup Finals: against Ipswich, Manchester United and West Ham between 1978 and 1980. The classic against United was an experience never to be forgotten. "It was just magical. People often ask me what would have happened if it had gone to extra time. I think we'd have been flattened. We outplayed them in the first half, went two goals up and then sat on it instead of really going for the jugular. Then they get a goal, then another and you're thinking: 'Bloody hell, what's going on

here?' Then we go straight back down the other end to get another. It was a mad last few minutes. It's a magical thing to walk around that place at the end if you've won, to soak in the bath drinking champagne, to get back on the coach with everyone celebrating. Those were the good days. I've come out of Wembley after some bad ones, I can tell you."

One of those, as it happens, occurred the following year when a shattered Arsenal side couldn't summon the energy to pop West Ham United's bubble. "We just didn't turn up against West Ham. The best thing that happened was that we only lost 1-0. It was a baking hot day and we were knackered. Don Howe told half of us to get in the shower at half-time because that might wake us up. After that we went across to Brussels thinking we'd make up for the disappointment..." It wasn't to be. After a tense stalemate against Valencia in the 1980 Cup Winners' Cup Final, in which Arsenal played pretty well, they lost 4-5 on penalties when their two most reliable technicians, Liam Brady and Graham Rix, missed from the spot. "It was an end to a miserable time. We'd done well in the league, everything looked rosy, then all of a sudden you lose two in a few days and the season finishes very flat. For some clubs it would have been OK, but not for Arsenal."

Brady left to further his football education with Juventus and 12 months later, Frank Stapleton flew the nest in the direction of Old Trafford. The heart of the team had been painfully ripped out, triggering a costly spell of gross mediocrity.

O'Leary remembers sitting in the Highbury dressing room after the humiliating Milk Cup defeat to Walsall in November 1983 and listening to the crowd outside calling for manager Terry Neill's head. "It was the only time I can remember the fans shouting like that. The feeling around the Club wasn't great. It was a bad side and a bad time." Not long after the Walsall debacle Neill was sacked and his assistant, Don Howe, had a proper crack in the hot seat. "I never got to know Don that well – always found him fairly distant – but I thought he was a great coach, a revelation. He was good for the football club. I'd grown up with the Double team, hearing those lads say that Don should never have been allowed to leave after that success. When he came back you could see what they meant." As for succeeding as a manager, that accolade largely eluded a man with Arsenal in his blood, a man whose main strength undoubtedly lay on the training ground.

O'Leary knew the score before many at the Club, so might not have been all that surprised when George Graham was eventually chosen as Howe's successor. It wasn't too long before the player got a call from Steve Burtenshaw (who had been in charge in a caretaker capacity) asking if he could go up and see the new

boss. Within the first few minutes of their chat, in which Graham plainly laid down all the new ground rules, O'Leary was firmly convinced that this tough-talking Scot was going to lead the Club in the right direction. "I came out of that meeting thinking we'd got the right bloke here. There wasn't going to be any messing around."

No special favours either. Thirteen years of service or not, O'Leary, like the rest, would have to prove his worth. That's why he was offered only a one-year contract to replace the one expiring that summer. He left the manager's office promising to think about the offer, knowing his testimonial had been scheduled for the following pre-season. Two weeks later, Graham asked O'Leary if he could come round to his house. There, the manager passionately outlined his plans and ambitions. Suitably impressed, O'Leary made up his mind there and then to sign the new deal. The relationship between the two strengthened down the years as Graham took to consulting his senior player on certain matters. You would occasionally see them up the front of the team bus, heads down in conversation. Watching from further back, we were all desperate to know the gist of the chats.

Yet one piece of advice memorably backfired. "One of my funniest memories of George was when he asked me about Tony [Adams]. He wasn't playing well and George was going to leave him out and put [Steve] Bouldy in. I said I thought it would kill Tony if he was left out because he was going through a bad time after Euro 88 – Marco van Basten and all that. He'd been crucified. Anyway, I come in the next day and it's me who's been left out. I went to see the boss and he said he wanted to bring Bouldy in. He said: 'You said it would kill Tony if he was left out so I thought I'd leave you out instead.' I thought 'That's the last time I give him advice!'"

The Graham years saw O'Leary's influence on the pitch gradually decline as a newly assembled back four took firm hold of the tiller. But O'Leary had a hunch there were good times ahead and was just happy to be part of the set-up. Graham had won the Littlewoods (League) Cup in his first season, but the piece of silverware that everyone really desired – the League Championship trophy – was just round the corner. To be picked in the 11 that ran out at Anfield on May 26, 1989 was pleasing enough. But to be there at the end, when the title was won in the most dramatic circumstances imaginable, represented O'Leary's most memorable moment in an Arsenal shirt. This was what he had craved from the start – to come out on top at the end of a testing league season. And just like at Burnley all those years ago, his father, Christie, was present to savour the moment. During those tumultuous postmatch celebrations, our centre-half could be seen sobbing his heart out in the arms of his dad.



Little did he know it, but two years later O'Leary would be celebrating another title, this time with his team losing only one league game. The positive vibes he had felt after that first meeting with Graham had come to fruition in glorious fashion. "Without a doubt he was the right person at the right time for this football Club," O'Leary reflects about his old manager. "He was a hard taskmaster, but great to work for. I just wanted to have a role. If I hadn't, I'd have wanted to go. I knew that George wouldn't keep me there for the sake of it. It's not like that at Arsenal. When your time is up, that's it."

Yet what a time it was. He couldn't have asked for anything better. Over the course of 20 years, O'Leary inevitably came across a wide variety of characters: some comical, some reserved, some cocky, some totally overawed; all of them, however, contributing towards a wealth of priceless memories. Malcolm Macdonald provides a particularly amusing one: "Supermac was the type who could play rubbish and score a hat-trick. He could also come out with a fair bit of nonsense. He'd say: 'Oh, I always listen to Radio Four in the car.' He could have fooled me. Whenever I got a lift with him, his car was full of Bay City Rollers tapes! On trips abroad, he'd walk through the airport with a big fat copy of *War and Peace* under his arm. Just for show, mind."

Footballers tend to be a superstitious bunch, but even among them O'Leary stood out. As soon as the bell sounded to signal it was time to leave the dressing room, this good Catholic boy would quickly reach into the inside pocket of his jacket hanging up on his peg and kiss the silver cross he wore round his neck. Once in the tunnel, he would often cause a pile up by stopping without warning to fiddle with his laces. And out on the pitch, his warm-up had to finish with a volley of the ball in a particular direction. "It got to the stage where I tied myself up in knots with all the superstitions. I decided when I went into management that I'd do none of that. Absolutely nothing. You'd never be able to concentrate."

Superstitious or not, it takes a certain type to do what O'Leary has done. You must be incredibly tough mentally to survive for so long at what is, in reality, a very demanding place. Not everyone can take the pressure in their stride; O'Leary, however, positively thrived on the buzz. "I always enjoyed that side of things. I grew up with it. You could always hear a grumble go round Highbury at half-time if we hadn't played well. I actually enjoyed that. I've seen some very good players, fantastic somewhere else, who were unable to cope with that environment."

We walk into the room that records his career from A to Z. Hanging up at the top, running round like a border, is every team photo in which O'Leary appears. "Each year there'd be a cull and you'd hope to make the team photo for the following pre-season. As I started collecting those photos it struck me that I'd

managed to figure in 20 line-ups." So how on earth did he do it? "I was never a big drinker. Could never take it. I always felt as well that you had to rest properly and stretch properly. But injuries are the main thing. I never had a knee injury for instance. I think, as well, that Graham's arrival was good for me. It gave me a lift, kept me on my toes.

"There were times when I thought about leaving, but once I'd passed 10 years I started thinking that I'd love to do 20. When I broke Geordie's record of 622 games, I wanted to be the first player, the only player, to reach 700. I signed my professional forms on May 2, 1973 so when George called me in to say he'd be letting me go at the end of the 1992/1993 season, that was enough for me. The icing on the cake was getting to the League Cup and FA Cup finals."

Which brings us back to the beginning, or rather the end – that FA Cup Final replay victory against Sheffield Wednesday. "I remember coming down those steps with the Cup in my hand. When you've won, Wembley should be about walking round and lapping it up. But that evening was both the greatest and the saddest. I knew that when I got round to the far end and went down that tunnel, that would be the end of me and Arsenal Football Club."

O'Leary's final farewell to Highbury came in April 2006 when his Aston Villa side visited. "Afterwards, I walked back out on to the pitch after everybody had gone. The ground was empty. I just stood there, had a last look around and said my goodbyes. It had been a great place, a great home, but it was time to move on."

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# Changing times

**Terry Neill's Arsenal were a team in transition, with players increasingly aware of their status, but the genial Irishman takes a refreshingly honest view of his time as manager**

"I've had some lavish, over-the-top-praise and I've suffered terrible stick. The truth lies, as it so often does, somewhere in between." – Terry Neill, talking in 2006.

His style was talkaholic bonhomie, a contrast to the whip-cracking Bertie Mee who preceded him, but Terry Neill's reign as Arsenal manager from 1976-1983 was marked by revolt and turbulence. By Cup runs, too – all the way to Wembley for three successive years and an appearance in the Cup Winners' Cup Final for luck (though not so lucky when Graham Rix missed his penalty in the shoot-out against Valencia).

But alongside the cavalier Cup exploits was the day-to-day angst of managing a set of wilful, egotistical footballers, almost as famous as rock stars, who would struggle to bow to the demands of a manager only slightly older than themselves. He was always ahead of himself, the Ulsterman. The smooth-talking, intelligent, amiable Irishman, for all his wit and determination, was frequently at loggerheads with players who were beginning to feel the first stirrings of player power. Malcolm Macdonald, a huge ego with a phenomenal goalscoring record; Alan Hudson, a fabulous ball player with a passion for parties; Alan Ball, an England World Cup winner with a quarrelsome bent; Charlie Nicholas, the Bonnie Prince from Scotland with Bono's looks and electric boots; the London Irish – Pat Jennings, Pat Rice, Sammy Nelson, Liam Brady, David O'Leary, Frank Stapleton. They were all there, in all their wonderful or wayward moods, for the inexperienced manager to handle.

Neill's Arsenal could be brilliant. The 1979 FA Cup Final when Willie Young out-muscled the terrifying, fang-gnashing Joe Jordan, and Alan Sunderland scored the winning goal in a thrilling climax, was his highest point. But there were also the epic Cup semi-finals against Liverpool in 1980, all four of them, and the Cup Winners' Cup semi-final victory at Juventus when a teenager, Paul Vaessen, came off the bench to score the winning goal. Yes, he had his moments, the Arsenal old boy turned young manager.

But he had his frustrations too. The loss of Brady and Stapleton to Juventus and Manchester United respectively. The occasional refusal of some of his players to regard Saturday nights as rest and recuperation time. The time when, in a fit of fury about his team significantly underperforming, he suggested they

might struggle to beat a "row of dustbins". It was one of his typically imaginative metaphors, not meant to wound but goad his stars to greater efforts, but the phrase caused umbrage in the locker room.

No one ever said it was easy. "I thought I was an OK manager," said Neill in 1999. "I wasn't a brilliant manager. I didn't do too badly, though, did I? I am sure that some of the players would disagree, but there you are. Don Howe always said we were a couple of idiots who should have taken more time off to play some golf. He was right – being a manager gets to you in the end."

When Neill, the precocious Ulsterman, arrived at Highbury as a 17-year-old amateur in 1960, he was invited to sit in the Directors' Box as a means of persuading him out of Bangor City and into an under-achieving Arsenal side. It worked. The boy decided to risk the challenge overseas and having signed for the Club, he attended his first match as a fully fledged Arsenal employee. Typically, he ensconced himself in the Directors' Box again. "I didn't give it a second thought. I just walked in through the front hall, past the bust of Herbert Chapman, up the marble stairs and into the box. I'm looking round wondering where all the other youth team players were! In the end it was Ron Greenwood, an Arsenal coach at the time, who got hold of me at half-time and very kindly whispered to me: 'Terry, the other players sit downstairs actually, in the dug out.' Well, no one had challenged me or anything. I'd just gone in and sat down. So I carried on sitting up there for the second half and I went downstairs from then on."

And so began an Arsenal career that spanned 23 years – with a gap in between to manage Hull City and, remarkably, Tottenham Hotspur. Not many people left White Hart Lane for Highbury and escaped the brunt of suspicion. But Neill was determined. "My wife, Sandra, always said I did everything too quickly: Arsenal captain, Northern Ireland captain and Arsenal manager at an age some were still playing. Youngest this, youngest that. And she's right. I should have been more successful. But life is too short for regrets."

His Highbury playing career had not forewarned him of any such excitement. "Oh yes, I remember my first sight of Highbury. I came in from Heathrow on the Tube, in a new raincoat. I probably had sandwiches. 'I'm a new boy,' was stamped on my forehead, as I walked up the steps to those magnificent front doors. And the first person I met at the top of those steps was the captain of the Club at the time, Tommy Docherty. He had his foot in plaster because he had an ankle injury. He took me under his wing, introduced me to everyone in the office, showed me around the place and dropped me off at my hotel in Finsbury Park. The next morning he picked me up again. For the next few months he kept an almost daily eye on me. It is one of those things in football you never forget.

"I was frightened to death when [manager] George Swindin told me I was playing my first game for the Club. We were in a hotel in Sheffield when he came up to me after pre-match training and said: 'Do you think you're ready?' I had a bit of a panic and my first thought was to say to him: 'Look give me a bit more time'. But thankfully, in the end, I blurted out 'Yes' and he said: 'Right, you're in tonight. You're taking Tommy Docherty's place in midfield.' I thought: 'Tommy's not going to be pleased about this. Oh gawd, what's he going to say?' Ten minutes later he appeared in front of me. He came and sought me out, sat me down ... and was brilliant.

"The highlights of my playing career were definitely under Bertie Mee and Don Howe. When they got into town after Billy Wright was sacked, things really started to get organised. Arsenal had some of the best players in the UK, but I can honestly say I don't think any of them were more determined than me. I had always been brought up by my family to believe there's no shame in failing, But there is shame in failing to have a go. I wasn't about to mess around. Very often I had to withstand shouts from the trainers when we were doing the hard running in training. I wasn't the quickest, I wasn't the best, I wasn't the most talented, but I think I was among the most determined. Some of the lazy, talented ones would say: 'Slow down, for crissake, there are no medals given out today'. But I wasn't obstinate, or strong enough, or bolshie enough, to say: 'You do your thing and I'll do mine'."

Neill was on the bench the ecstatic night Arsenal won the Fairs Cup at Highbury. "We must have showered gallons of champagne out of the dressing room windows on the delighted fans below. When I think about that now, and when I watch the winners on the podium in Formula One, I think: 'What a waste of champagne!' You get more mature and sensible. Now I'd throw a glass of water over them. They wouldn't care. They were so happy.

"But it had been coming, that result. You could see it coming, you could see the Double coming. That team was really tight. We used to have team meetings every Monday in the Halfway House, the little room with the sloping roof, half way up the Highbury tunnel. Talk about being open! We were frank enough to take the paint off the walls. It was foreign to us at first because we had been brought up in an era where you hedged around the truth. But this was open house. Don and Bertie used to pick on Frank and I first because they knew they'd get a reaction and get us going. It wasn't about criticism, it was about the search for perfection. I might have missed a header. Where was I? Why wasn't I covering there? It all came out. It got to the stage where Frank and I would have fought the world. Just light the blue touchpaper. Bob Wilson and Bob McNab, they did OK as well. There was no hiding place. But the great thing was there

was no sulking afterwards. It was your life exposed in front of your own face, in front of all your contemporaries. You laid your soul bare and it made us better men, once you got over how brutal it could be. Nowadays they'd have you up in front of the Court of Human Rights, but it never came to fisticuffs."

This is how the team was hardened, polished and resolved into the unit that won the Double in 1971. Neill did not stay to be part of it. He left in 1970 to become player-manager at Hull City, after 275 games and 10 goals for the Arsenal. He had served his decade, with dedication if not brilliance, with willingness if not wonderarousing skill. Six years later he was back – an extraordinary thing given Arsenal's famously conservative ways – as the new manager. In the meantime he had managed Hull (where he repaid a favour to Tommy Docherty by giving him a job) and Spurs. "I'd had seven glorious weeks out of work. It was a wonderful summer, quite a lot like the one when Highbury closed in 2006. I had two young kids in private school, a mortgage and I was probably in the best shape of my life. I tell you, I wasn't expecting the call. I knew from the papers that Arsenal were looking and on this particular day I'd just been for a run in a country park, coming back at lunchtime for a glass of white wine and spot of smoked salmon when the phone rang. It was Ken Friar. 'The Old Man would like you to come to lunch,' he said. He meant Denis Hill-Wood, the chairman. I always said the greatest thing about the place at Highbury was the people and the family spirit. Denis had been like a father to me. He lived in a nice country house in Hampshire with a lovely back lawn. We had a few drinks – Ken abstained – and lunch on the lawn. It wasn't until Ken was driving me back up the A3 that I said to him: 'What have I agreed to?' and he said: 'Welcome back'."

Neill was an Arsenal man again. "I wasn't arrogant, I wouldn't wish to sound arrogant. But how are you going to find out in life what you're made of, what you're capable of, other than by trying? I said to the Old Man, Denis Hill-Wood, before I started: 'They'll be a few rocky months ahead,' and he said: 'Terry, you just do what you think you've got to do'. We had to shift a few." One of his problems was the inheritance of Alan Ball. "Bally was pretty dominant, which was quite understandable from a World Cup winner, but Arsenal hadn't been the best of teams the past couple of years and things had to change. He was very much his own man. I've always respected and admired that. Then there was Peter Storey. Peter and I had lived together when we were players. We got on really well, but after a few months it was evident that he wasn't really going to get back, so he went off to Fulham."

In the meantime, Neill had not tarried in bringing one of the most ferocious strike forces in England to Highbury. A one-man strike force. Super-confident,



super-selfish, Supermac, who promised Neill he'd score 30 goals in his first season. "He came in and apologised at the end of the season for only scoring 29! I loved his confidence, his ego – and the rest of the boys loved it, too. With Malcolm, you'd leave him out of all technical discussions. There was no point. He did what he did and that was it. I remember the longest barren spell he had with us during his all-too-short years at Highbury. He'd gone about four games without a goal. Don Howe had a right go at him on the Friday before the game and said: 'You're lazy, idle, your touch has gone and you're here to score our goals.' Malcolm, to his credit, said: 'You're right, Don'. He just held his hands up. He went out the next day and scored a hat-trick. That was the other side of him. If you got the ball into him right, he was lovely to watch. So powerful, greedy, selfish and opinionated, but he scored goals and he excited everybody."

Excitement there was in plenty, not least when Neill decided to sign Alan Hudson, the maverick 1970 FA Cup winner from Chelsea. "He was such a great athlete and trainer. He was brilliant with the kids when he turned up, but I've never known anyone have flu more often! When his wife rang up for the umpteenth time to say he had flu, I drove over to his house in Putney with the physio, Fred Street, and parked outside his driveway. His car was there – dented, I noticed. I rang the front door bell and, rather blearily in his dressing gown, Alan came to the door. He invited us in for a cup of tea and immediately admitted that he had been to the races the day before. No fudging, no hedging. He was in the next day at training and outran everybody. For a bit of discipline I stuck him on the bench for the next game against Manchester City. We weren't making much progress and so he said: 'Look Tel, get me on. I can sort this out now.' So I said: 'Right, away you go.' We won comfortably. Fantastic player."

Then there was Mr. Reliable. "Oh, I loved nicking Big Pat from Tottenham Hotspur," said Neill, of the greatest goalkeeper in Spurs's history. "Well, I had contacts. There was no genius involved. Pat was 32, and in those days goalkeepers were lumped in with the other players and considered over the hill by then. For some reason the Spurs manager thought that Pat had lost a bit of his edge, but I had no hesitation in giving him a four-year-contract. He was the sort of player who would do it for you week in, week out, rain, snow, sunshine, home, away, everything. People thought I was doing a favour for a friend. Eight years later Pat was still in the first team, playing international football and World Cups – and I was gone!"

The other great Spurs heist was Willie Young, a player that Neill would fight to eternity but still admire for his combative spirit, aerial prowess, and essential comedy material in training. "He was terrible at first. I remember thinking: 'What have I done?' when I saw him play his Arsenal debut. Then, within a

month, he became a folk hero. We still had rows. I used to invite him round the back of the stand sometimes to sort him out. Thank God he never accepted the invitation because he would have killed me."

Arsenal were the best Cup side of the late- Seventies, but the 1980 final was a step too far, "Our programme leading up to [the West Ham game] was: Southampton at home on Easter Saturday; Spurs away, Easter Monday; first leg of the semi-final of the Cup Winners' Cup against Juventus at home on the Wednesday; the first of our four semi-finals against Bob Paisley's Liverpool on the Saturday ... By the time the Cup Final actually happened, the players were knackered, the staff were knackered. We couldn't even train. I banned the players from training from Easter onwards. But obviously something had gone right to reach three Cup Finals on the trot. We had good players, Don came back and I signed Bob Wilson as a goalkeeping coach before anyone even knew I was the Arsenal manager. I rang him up and said I was coming straight round. We struck a deal there and then. But the nicest thing about those three cup finals is that they were against three of my best pals in football: Bobby Robson, of Ipswich Town, Dave Sexton, at Manchester United, and John Lyall, of West Ham. I remember against United, after we'd watched one of the most amazing finishes to a Cup Final ever, Dave Sexton just coming straight across to me. It was a measure of the man, that he was a gentleman even in such terrible defeat. Alfredo Di Stefano, one of the greatest names in European football history, was just as gracious when Valencia beat Arsenal in the Cup Winners' Cup final. He was their manager at the time and he just came over and gave me a hug. So too Giovanni Trapattoni after the semi-final that year: there was a knock on the door of the dressing room after the match and Trapattoni came in to congratulate us. It was the first time that Juventus had ever been beaten at home in a European tie. He gave me a Juve training shirt and wished us all the best."

It seemed Neill and Arsenal had a fine working relationship, but from 1980 the success tailed off. "We just lost games. If you're with a club for more than five years you can sometimes get a hang-over effect. You're not as sharp. You can't see the wood for the trees. I'm sure that happened to me. I'd lost Liam Brady to Italy, lost Frank Stapleton the year after. I've always said the two of them were within their rights to go and handled themselves impeccably. I even said to Liam: 'Look, if I were in your position I would like to go and have a look. Test myself.' He said: 'What if I go over there and don't crack it?' I said: 'Well, if you like, we'll put a clause in the contract that insists we get first option on your return'.

"In the end Arsenal let me go. They owed me nothing. I owed them nothing. It was the most amicable sacking in the history of football. We never fell out. I

was back three days after I left the Club for the Christmas party." The parting had become inevitable. The run of bad results combined with the feeling that incoming players like Vladimir Petrovic (an early Euro experiment that did not quite have Arsène Wenger's Midas touch), Tony Woodcock and Lee Chapman had not greatly enhanced the squad. With Neill feeling vulnerable and jaded, the team suffered a disastrous defeat to Walsall in the League Cup (when Neill mentioned some of his players in the same breath as 'pantomime horses').

When he was sacked by Peter, son of Denis Hill-Wood, he recalled a conversation they had had when the new chairman had replaced his father. "Peter was in my office one day and I told him: 'When the time comes for you to sack me...' 'Don't be silly,' he replied. 'We've grown up at this Club together. We'll be here forever.' 'Peter, no, it doesn't work like that. My job is to get results and if I don't get the results, I'm out. And there's more. When the time comes, would it be possible to have the sack just before Christmas rather than wait until the summer?' 'What the hell do you mean?' 'Well, look, I've been in this game since the age of 17. I've never been able to enjoy Christmas. I've always been training and playing or whatever.' 'Oh, daft Irish... I'm off.' So he went off and four or five years later, I got my wish.

"Don [Howe] took over and the first thing he did was take me out to lunch, Dom Perignon and all that. That's style. Arsenal have always had style. You feel from a very early stage that it's not just about you. You are a small cog in this whole thing at Arsenal. Highbury was a major part of my life. I've had a very good life, but at the same time I worked bloody hard for it. I may not always have given the impression of working and I know on occasions people have thought I was just a 'Kiss the Blarneystone' Ulsterman who's been lucky. But you're not lucky for as long as I was without a bit of graft now and then."

**Sue Mott**

7.

# **The stuff of dreams**

Imagine a team combining the steel of Frank McLintock and Tony Adams at the back, the wizardry of Alex James and Liam Brady in midfield and the lethal finishing of Cliff Bastin and Thierry Henry...

# **The ultimate team selection**

Choosing the greatest eleven players ever to represent the Gunners proved a desperately difficult – if immensely enjoyable – task for our panel of experts

Compiling an Arsenal Dream Team is fraught with pitfalls. How do you decide, for instance, between Ted Drake and Thierry Henry, or Jack Kelsey and David Seaman? Drake rattled in 139 goals for fun during the second half of the 1930s, ending up with a goals-to-game ratio that surpasses even his great French striking successor. At the time of writing, Henry has been unable to get close to matching Drake's strike rate. Similarly, who's to say that Seaman was any better than Kelsey, whose career ran from 1949 to 1962, or the majestic Pat Jennings?

Mind you, how do you ever compare players from different eras, particularly those separated by about 60 years? The game has moved on so much in terms of pace, power, technique and tactics that it has become practically unrecognisable from the old, measured version weighed down by bulbous boots, muddy pitches and sodden, laced-up balls. Yet that's not to say, though, that Herbert Chapman's heroes and George Allison's achievers should not be featured in this all-time XI. They most certainly should – as much for their trailblazing deeds as their ball-playing skills.

Eddie Hapgood, for example, was an elegantly powerful left-back who captained Arsenal to five league titles and two FA Cups during those sparkling 1930s. That record alone ultimately nudges him ahead of highly laudable candidates such as Bob McNab, Kenny Sansom, Nigel Winterburn and Ashley Cole.

Of the other pre-war greats, Cliff Bastin's remarkable goalscoring exploits from the left wing secure the berth that Geordie Armstrong might otherwise have claimed. Similarly, it is difficult to ignore the contribution of Alex James – a delightfully creative force at inside-forward, who loaded bullets over eight years for Drake, Bastin and David Jack. Hence James's inclusion, albeit out of position on the right-wing. Indeed, James stands alone as the only square peg in a round hole. All the other members of the Dream Team have been picked in their regular positions, where they excelled over extended spells, but James just had to be included somehow.

So what does it take to make the final cut? Longevity, for one thing, definitely helps since it requires something special to remain at Arsenal. In addition, some success along the way helps to bolster a player's claims. That's why Lee Dixon pips Pat Rice for the right-back slot. Both won trophies, but

Dixon won the most during 14 fantastic years.

Tony Adams and Frank McLintock take the central defensive spots, as much for their stirring leadership qualities as anything else. David O'Leary wasn't far away, and neither was Steve Bould, but the two skippers get the nod for their outright inspiration.

However, other names gain automatic selection without too much hand-wringing over the alternatives. Some marvellous players have patrolled central midfield, ranging from Bob John, Joe Mercer and Emmanuel Petit, through to the wonderful Francesc Fabregas, who will surely become an all-time great. As things stand, though, it is hard to look beyond Liam Brady and Patrick Vieira, two of the finest exponents of their trade ever to have lived.

In attack, you can make a strong argument for including the likes of Ian Wright, Jimmy Brain, John Radford and Doug Lishman. But the eye keeps coming back to a couple of other names. Henry, as Arsenal's most prolific scorer in history – arguably the most exquisitely talented striker ever to wear the red and white – makes the team without too much fuss. Dennis Bergkamp does, too; if you are looking for pure craft and invention – a front man with fantasies in his head and goal dust in his boots – then look no further.

It's not a bad line-up, I think you'll agree. Magnificently resolute at the back, this team shouldn't run short of ideas going forward.

**Alan Smith**

*The Dream Team was selected by the principal writers of the Arsenal Opus – Alan Smith, Sue Mott and David Miller.*



# Safe hands

**Full name** David Andrew Seaman

**Date of birth** September 19, 1963 (Rotherham, England)

**Arsenal record** 564 appearances, 0 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 3 League titles, 4 FA Cups, 1 League Cup, 1 European Cup Winners' Cup

David Seaman's Arsenal career, which turned into 13 years of astonishing success, couldn't have started any better. In fact, you could argue that he never quite surpassed the magnificent form of his debut campaign (1990/1991) when his new club lost only one game in comfortably winning the League title. Seaman was awesome that year, the very epitome of unflappable excellence in conceding a paltry 18 goals. Looking back, though, maybe it was just as well that he hit the ground running, for he had arrived under pressure, with a lot to live up to as the controversial replacement for the popular John Lukic.

In the preceding years, Lukic had turned into a cult hero at Highbury, his status confirmed by the part he played at Anfield in 1989 when the Championship was clinched in the dying seconds. By the end of the following season, however, the tide had turned, at least as far as the manager was concerned. George Graham was determined to get his hands on the bloke earning rave reviews up the road at Queens Park Rangers. To begin with, a lot of Arsenal fans couldn't understand it. Why go elsewhere, they asked, when we've already got 'Lukey'? On the final day of the season at Norwich City, they defiantly sang their hero's name on the street outside the dressing room. To no avail. The boss's mind was made up. Yes, Lukic was good, Graham later reasoned, but in Seaman he was recruiting someone he thought was the best.

It took only a few games for his new teammates to agree. We could see right away that the big, amiable Yorkshireman with a ready grin and a booming laugh was something quite special. It was the way he seemed to blot out the goal with his huge frame, the way he effortlessly cut down angles to turn a difficult save into something straightforward. An instinctive block with the legs, an unhurried

catch in a crowd – like all the best craftsmen, he had the knack of making his job look incredibly simple. If Lukic was good, Seaman was brilliant, lifting the art of goalkeeping to an entirely new level.

That excellence continued in the years that followed and was never more evident than in the 1994 European Cup Winners' Cup Final. Seaman went into that game against Parma far from 100 per cent fit because of a cracked rib, which was restricting his movement. There was concern that he might not do himself justice.

We should have known better. Seaman pulled off several improbable saves that night in Copenhagen, despite being in agony every time he moved. Thankfully, great dollops of stubbornness and pride, along with several painkilling injections, overcame the discomfort.

Twelve months on, the news wasn't quite so good. Back in the Cup Winners' Cup Final, a hopeful effort from a good 40 yards by Nayim, a former Tottenham Hotspur player no less, deceived Arsenal's backtracking keeper to win the spoils for Real Zaragoza. In tears at the end, Seaman was beside himself with remorse, constantly apologising to a silent dressing room. There really was no need. After all, without his penalty heroics in the semi-final shoot-out against Sampdoria, the team wouldn't even have made it to Paris. But try telling that to a merciless public. In the following years, from Sunderland to Southampton, from Birmingham to Blackburn, Seaman would never be allowed to forget the night he was beaten from "the halfway line".

Ah, the life of a goalie: you can pull up trees every week, prove the model of consistency across seasons, then ruin it all in the blink of an eye. Take Ronaldinho's long-range effort in the 2002 World Cup Finals, when the Brazilian's free kick/shot (will we ever know the truth?) floated over England's No 1 and into the net. A matter of months later, Seaman's 75-cap international career drew to a close after Macedonia somehow scored direct from a corner.

In mitigation, most of these errors occurred in the player's late 30s, when his mobility and judgment were becoming impaired. For the most part, very few could ever hope to match Seaman's levels of refinement and consistency. After several years of Seaman, old heads around Highbury, who had always reverentially described Pat Jennings, or Jack Kelsey, as the best, changed their allegiance.

Keepers are judged by the number of mistakes they make and Seaman tended to make fewer than anyone. To have him in goal in his prime, to see this cool, smiling figure standing between the sticks, was a wonderful boost to teammates. Here was a man who paid great attention to detail, studying all aspects of his beloved trade.

A late reminder of such unerring dedication came near the end of his career in Arsenal's 2003 FA Cup semi-final against Sheffield United. In his 1,000th professional match, Seaman pulled off what many regard as one of the greatest saves of all time. With Arsenal leading 1-0 and 10 minutes left, a close-range header from United's Paul Peschisolido looked a certain goal. The ball was already behind Seaman, nearly over the line, when the 39-year-old made his move, displaying remarkable agility and reactions to twist backwards and claw it away with his right hand.

'Safe Hands', they called him. He even used the phrase himself as a marketing tool and the term, in fairness, wasn't misplaced. For the vast majority of his career, you couldn't find hands that came any safer.

**Alan Smith**

# Simply the best

**Full name** Edris Albert Hapgood

**Date of birth** September 24, 1908 (Bristol, England)

**Arsenal record** 440 appearances, 2 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 5 League titles, 2 FA Cups

Tom Finney, one of that trio of exceptional English wingers along with Stanley Matthews (Stoke City and Blackpool) and Cliff Bastin (Arsenal), remembers vividly his appearance at Wembley, aged 17, in 1942, for the wartime Cup Final between Preston North End and Arsenal. He had just begun to make his name with the Lancashire club, the start of a one-club career that would blossom over three decades and earn him a reputation no less than that of the maestro Matthews. His opponent on this afternoon was the already-legendary Eddie Hapgood, left-back of both Arsenal and England and widely regarded as by far the best in the business. Finney was not yet the dazzling figure who would share in the 10-goal thrashing of Portugal in Lisbon five years later, but he vividly recalls the experience.

"It was quite an occasion for me as a young teenager," Sir Tom, knighted in 1998, remembers. "Hapgood was very good, no question – quick, strong and an outstanding passer of the ball. For a fullback he had a really cultured game. He was of the same medium build and style as Ray Wilson, of Huddersfield Town [and Everton], who would help England win the World Cup. He generously gave me quite a bit of encouragement throughout the match, and congratulated me afterwards, the game having finished in a 1-1 draw. We won the replay 2-1 at Blackburn. It wasn't long after that I joined up."

Hapgood was indeed exceptional. One of Herbert Chapman's early signings, in 1927, he was only 19 when he moved from Kettering Town. But Hapgood became a figurehead in Arsenal's rock-solid defence, a stalwart of teams which were to win the League title five times and the FA Cup twice. Including wartime matches, he played 43 times for England, 34 as captain. He rarely missed a match for Arsenal between 1929 and 1939 and made 440 appearances, 393 in the

League. Bernard Joy, the amateur with Casuals FC who was later to join Hapgood as centre-half, was as impressed as Finney. "Eddie was one of the finest players ever to put on the red and white jersey. Whenever I came up against him in practice matches, usually on a Tuesday morning at Highbury, I was impressed by his wonderful positional sense." In an era of man-for-man marking, Hapgood was one of the best in the business. He was fast enough to match any winger, and his ball control was as close as most midfield men. He was also a player of immense courage. In a brutal match against Italy in 1934, the notorious Battle of Highbury, he returned to the field with a broken nose. As captain, he was a player of dignity and diplomacy at a time when political tensions throughout Western Europe were steadily mounting.

An anxiety when he first joined the Club was his tendency to be knocked out when heading the ball on one particular spot, which puzzled contemporary medics. Sometimes he would be able to take no further part in the game, and Chapman was worried about the risk of playing him in First Division games. Tom Whittaker, Arsenal's shrewd trainer and physiotherapist, was of the opinion that the problem was Hapgood's general lack of physical strength: he weighed only a little over nine stone, which was slight for a fullback. In fact, he was the lightest fullback on the books of any League club. Whittaker's solution was to consult the player's landlady – with whom he was lodging together with winger Joe Hulme – and ensure that she plied him with generous meals, including plenty of steak. In short time, Hapgood gained nearly two stone, and soon was holding his place in the team, never relinquishing it for any lengthy period. His fitness was aided by the fact that he neither smoked nor drank, which were uncommon abstinences for players of that era.

Hapgood was far from being a conventional fullback of those times: hit the ball and the man hard, if necessary into the third row of the stands. Firstly, he was never a dirty player, and abhorred those who were. At the same time he could be said to be one of the first intellectual defenders. He was absorbed, as he recalled in his autobiography *Football Ambassador*, with how, technically, to subdue a winger. Particularly Matthews. "He is one of the greatest, and I always enjoyed our clashes. He made me work harder than any other winger, but I don't think Stan got much change out of Arsenal because, knowing that my colleagues were taking care of the rest of the Stoke side, I was able to go all out on stopping the Prince of the Potteries. I realised that the only way to play him properly was to prevent him getting the ball. He liked the pass to his feet and was at his most dangerous standing still. So, if the pass to him was blocked, his effectiveness was cut down to nil. Let him have the ball, and it was fatal to hesitate in your tackle. He was surprisingly fast when he was past you and took a lot of

catching."

Hapgood related that his general tactic was positional marking at an angle inside the winger: close but allowing him the seeming freedom of the line, where Hapgood's own speed would enable him to channel the opponent into a cul-de-sac. "If he tried to centre, I could block it with my head or chest. If it went over my left shoulder, it would go behind or to the goalkeeper, if over my right shoulder it would be of little use to his forwards [behind them]. It didn't always work out, but it certainly helped during my long career."

Following the war, Hapgood briefly managed Blackburn Rovers, then Watford and Bath City. After losing the Bath job in 1956 – having taken them to the second round of the FA Cup and been voted Southern League manager of the year in 1953 – he requested a retrospective benefit from Arsenal and was dismayed when the Club was unable to agree. Subsequently he became a tennis coach, then later warden of a hostel for apprentices with the Atomic Energy Authority. One of England's greatest fullbacks, Hapgood died on Good Friday, 1973.

**David Miller**

# Captain fantastic

**Full name** Francis McLintock

**Date of birth** December 28, 1939 (Glasgow, Scotland)

**Arsenal record** 403 appearances, 32 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 1 League title, 1 FA Cup, 1 European Inter-Cities Fairs Cup

Frank McLintock was born in 1939 in the Gorbals, that then notorious area of Glasgow. Though he enjoyed the security of a woefully poor but proudly independent-minded and law-abiding family, McLintock witnessed, throughout his childhood, such incessant violence and crime that it is a wonder how he ever succeeded in building a sensible, rational and decent life. McLintock did so, not only conspicuously, with passion and bravura and at times an admitted excess of emotion, but also became one of the most accomplished players of his generation with Leicester City and then Arsenal, and an inspirational captain to rival Joe Mercer before him and Tony Adams after him. If commitment was measured in weight, McLintock's would have filled several hundredweight sacks.

His arrival at Highbury in 1964 was at a moment when Arsenal had won nothing for 11 years, and were in a state of middling decline which would continue for another five years. Yet by the sheer drive of his personality, his inspiration to those playing around him, and his understanding and application of the coaching and tactical ideas of first Dave Sexton and then Don Howe, McLintock helped initiate the second of three glorious periods in Arsenal's history. It included the Club's first League and FA Cup Double in 1971, emulating that of their arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur 10 years earlier. There was also victory in the Fairs Cup in 1970, plus two losing League Cup Finals.

"Frank is one of my favourite people," Sexton recalls. "He was an extremely influential captain, such a forceful personality. Tactically, he was seriously interested in everything I wanted to put across to the players. On the field, he took over, he was in charge." This close personal coaching relationship

continued when Sexton was succeeded by Howe. "Frank lived next door to me at Southgate," Howe remembers. "We would travel into work together, talking, the way you do. When I arrived I wanted to change the tactical system to a degree, telling him 'I want you defending where it's important, in the centre in front of the goal'. He'd been up until then a wing-half, a midfielder. He was a student of the game, and understood everything – although sometimes we'd have raging arguments, arrive back at our homes, slam the car doors and shout 'See you in the morning'. It was great to work alongside him."

McLintock's diplomacy was equally important with the arrival, in 1971, of Alan Ball from Everton. Ball's style, put bluntly, simply did not fit, as it required the play to be directed through him as the midfield fulcrum, whereas Arsenal were geared to moving the ball forward directly to John Radford and Ray Kennedy, the central strikers. "Frank played a huge part in turning things around to my thinking," Ball recalled. "I was always banging on about the need to have two ways of playing because, especially in European competition, other teams would soon cotton on and take measures to counteract our known way. I preached the need to play the ball through me, where I could prompt more initiatives. Frank listened, and I was grateful to him. He is a strong character and the most forceful club captain I ever played under. He led by example."

As a youngster, scorning the attractions of the great Scottish clubs on his doorstep, McLintock had headed south to Leicester to sign amateur forms without even knowing where the city was. Becoming a dynamic player in midfield, he suffered the frustrations of defeats in two FA Cup Finals, in 1961 against the Spurs Double-winners and then in 1963 against Manchester United, complete with Denis Law, Bobby Charlton et al. Becoming impatient in the search for fulfilment, he joined Arsenal for £80,000, then a British record for a wing-half.

The range of McLintock's ambition found no immediate outlet at Highbury, where he discovered tactical chaos on and off the field. He confessed to feeling "ashamed" when the team finished 13th in the League in 1964/1965 and were knocked out of the FA Cup by lowly Peterborough United. Everything changed after Bertie Mee succeeded Billy Wright as manager at the start of the 1966/1967 season, and the coaches Sexton and subsequently Howe combined with their workaholic captain to improve the team. Although frustration continued with consecutive League Cup Final defeats to Leeds United and then Third Division Swindon Town in 1968 and 1969, McLintock refused to allow the Club's morale to drop, and the team responded by winning the Fairs Cup the next season, followed by the ultimate triumph of the Double in 1970/1971.

Bob Wilson, Arsenal's fine if somewhat phlegmatic goalkeeper, reflected at



the time: "Not long ago, I thought Frank was close to being finished. Yet his move into the back four [devised and agreed with Howe] has put years on his game. We need him there, and we need him as captain. He is far and away the best skipper I have played with, the most resilient character I have ever met in football. After our first-leg defeat, 3-1 away to Anderlecht in the Fairs Cup Final, Frank was the only man immediately convinced that we would win. 'We'll do them', he said as we sat miserably in the dressing room. He hauled us off our knees."

McLintock was not only the inspiration behind the Double, but also he was angry that so many rival supporters renewed the old chant of 'lucky Arsenal'. "We were fit, shrewd and adaptable," he says. "Looking back to that season I'm always drawn to the word resilience. I'm aware that it's not a particularly sexy concept. Teams that glitter in the memory, the Busby Babes, Real Madrid, Brazil, Ajax and even the unbeaten Arsenal side of 2003/2004, had superior qualities. But they also had enormous amounts of durability. Our attacking credentials have been downplayed by laymen, but without our ability not only to endure pressure but also to dish it out, we would never have achieved what we did. We had 10 one-nil victories, a sequence of results that formed the basis for that defiant North Bank anthem. You would think that such a narrow margin meant you were living on your nerves in those games, but I always felt quite comfortable defending this slender lead."

**David Miller**

# Mr Arsenal

**Full name** Tony Alexander Adams

**Date of birth** October 10, 1966 (Romford, England)

**Arsenal record** 669 appearances, 49 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 4 League titles, 3 FA Cups, 2 League Cups, 1 European Cup Winners' Cup

Tony Adams spent his entire playing career at Arsenal: 22 years of blood, sweat and tears (quite literally) during which time he changed immeasurably as a player and as a person, cleverly adjusting to Arsène Wenger's new regime.

In any appreciation of this inspirational footballer, it seems wrong to begin by broaching the subject of his battle with drink. Yet that seminal moment – when Adams bravely ‘came out’ as an alcoholic in 1996 – is difficult to avoid when summarising the fortunes of this redoubtable defender. As he was captain of England that year, it had been a heartbreaking end to his summer. Having seen his beloved country cruelly knocked out on penalties by Germany in the semi-finals of Euro 96, my former team-mate automatically embarked on an almighty ‘bender’ to try to numb the pain of the crushing disappointment. As usual, the tactic failed miserably but, having hit rock bottom by the middle of August, he took the life-changing decision to finally confront his demons.

As luck would have it, Arsène Wenger turned up at Highbury the following month. Any earlier and who knows what he would have found lying in wait: the impending marriage might not even have taken place. As it was, although Adams couldn't possibly know it at the time, the Frenchman's arrival was to mark the beginning of another glorious assault on English silverware, culminating, for the skipper, in a second League and FA Cup Double in 2002. At that point Adams retired, his work very much done, having become the only player in English history to captain a League-winning side in three different decades.

Right from the start, going back to his debut as a raw 17-year-old, it was obvious that Adams was captaincy material. Senior pros would be taken aback

by the cocky youngster bawling out instructions without a second's thought for his lowly standing. It all came so naturally to the chirpy lad from Romford. Known to this day as 'Rodders' after the character in *Only Fools and Horses*, the gawky teenager was quickly maturing into a fine centre-half. Even so, it was still something of a surprise a couple of years later when George Graham summoned the defender to the manager's office to make him, at 21, Arsenal's youngest-ever captain. The famous back four, not yet fully assembled, would go on to provide a decade of incredible service with Adams at the centre of everything.

Leadership skills, however, were only the half of it. While Adams was always known for being outstandingly brave, his mobility and speed rarely warranted a mention. The player was actually a better athlete than he gave himself credit for, never mind anyone else. Much quicker across the turf than people assumed, he had a formidable physique that got even stronger once he started refuelling in the right way. More than anything, perhaps, Adams could read the game beautifully to anticipate danger. If someone made a mistake, he was covering in a flash, never afraid to find Row Z if that was the safest option.

Regrettably, this no-nonsense approach, coupled with an own goal at Old Trafford towards the end of the 1988/1989 title-winning season, led to ridiculous 'donkey' jibes becoming the norm. From then on, if Tony slipped up, if he made the slightest mistake, opposing fans pounced with a heap of abuse.

A lesser character might have shrunk meekly into his shell, but Adams stuck out his chest, kept volunteering for the ball until, several years later, the invective gave way to universal respect. Nevertheless, it had been a huge test of character, one that included a short spell in prison for a drink-driving offence. Over Christmas that year, he sat in his cell listening to match commentaries on the radio, determined that the experience wouldn't break his spirit.

Back at Highbury, the team tried to cope without its driving force. In the dressing room before matches, Tony had always pumped himself up, barking words of encouragement and growling with aggression in the 'raw meat' style of Terry Butcher, his mentor with England. Things changed substantially, however, after his 1996 watershed. Having faced up to his alcohol addiction, having become, as a result, a more reserved and thoughtful figure, his booming pre-match addresses largely died down. In his trouble-strewn life, Tony Alexander Adams was turning a new page.

As far as Tottenham Hotspur, the old enemy, was concerned, his winning goal at Wembley in the 1993 FA Cup semi-final temporarily silenced a large body of critics. That far-post header was, in fact, typical of the man. Showing a fine sense of occasion, he popped up quite often when the pressure was on. It certainly was that day. After losing out to a Paul Gascoigne-inspired Spurs two

years before, also at the semi-final stage, Arsenal could not afford to lose this one. Not for the first time, their captain delivered.

Yet none of his goals was more memorable or fitting than the emphatic half-volley against Everton to crown Arsenal's 1998 Championship celebrations. With the net billowing, the scorer turned back to his team-mates, arms aloft, with a look of pure joy. It was the defining moment of a marvellous career, capturing all the effort and heartache that had come before.

Adams played 669 games for Arsenal (only David O'Leary has managed more) on the way to becoming the Club's most successful captain. In addition, he won 66 England caps over 14 years. For several years, the number six shirt remained unused at Arsenal, as if it were unfair asking anyone else to do it justice. Comparisons, after all, come with the territory. Few could ever hope to emulate Tony Adams.

**Alan Smith**

# Ever dependable

**Full name** Lee Michael Dixon

**Date of birth** March 17, 1964 (Manchester, England)

**Arsenal record** 619 appearances, 28 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 3 League titles, 2 FA Cups, 1 European Cup Winners' Cup

Perhaps the highest accolade that can be bestowed upon Lee Dixon is that, over the course of 14 hugely successful years at Arsenal, he made the very best of his God-given talents. By the time he retired in the summer of 2002, with a huge haul of medals to show for his efforts, he could look back on his time with a totally clear conscience, having pushed mind and body to their very limits.

In reality, few footballers can truthfully say that. Usually, one or two regrets lurk somewhere along the line, whether it's a lack of application or a certain lethargy due to staying at one club for too long. Not Dixon. This was a player who didn't hold back; driven on, it seemed, by a burning desire to prove people wrong. He had never forgotten the day when John Bond, then manager of Burnley, called the youngster into his office to break the bad news. Not good enough, Bond said. A free transfer ensued. Over the years, that memory became a standing joke with the 'reject' who went on to become an unqualified success as part of the legendary back four assembled by George Graham.

Yet when Dixon first arrived at Highbury in January 1988, his new teammates saw a right-back with plenty to learn. Following spells at Chester City and Bury, this athletic enthusiast from the suburbs of south Manchester had made his name at Stoke City as a marauding flier, a dashing blonde figure bombing up the flank. Back then, the subtle art of defending didn't preoccupy his thoughts.

It soon did, though, as Graham got to work on the new boy – in tandem with Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn – in an effort to build some solid foundations. A series of intense practice sessions followed at London Colney, as Graham worked incessantly on honing organisation and understanding between the future 'fab four'. As the seeds of something very

special were being sewn in the late 1980s, Dixon was adjusting to the demands of topflight football. He volunteered to take penalties and, to the surprise of his team-mates, became extremely reliable from 12 yards out.

Having carved a handy niche at Highbury, he won the first of 22 England caps in April 1990. Supporters up and down the land scoffed at the thought, singing: 'If Dixon plays for England so can I.' The mocking chant was aimed at a player deemed by outsiders as being less than classy, reliant on athletic prowess more than ball-playing skills. To a certain extent, this was probably true at the start. In those early days, Dixon still had some rough edges to knock off on the way to becoming a polished all-round performer. Yet opposing fans couldn't see his counter-balancing qualities. There was an inherent tenacity about the player, a stubborn refusal ever to lie down.

Good, bad or indifferent, Dixon never gave up. Whether it was in training or matches, this dogged character constantly pushed himself on, never shirking a challenge. A highly tuned competitive instinct turned out a thoroughly awkward customer. This led to one or two longrunning duels, none more memorable than a fascinating tussle with David Ginola that lasted several seasons after starting in Paris in 1994. It was the semi-final, first leg of the European Cup Winners' Cup and, playing for Paris St Germain, Ginola was in his prime. That night, the powerful wide man gave Dixon a tough time, combining silky skills with strength on the way to scoring in a 1-1 draw. It was a lesson for Dixon, who took it all in, determined never to come off second best again. When the Frenchman subsequently came over to England to play for Newcastle United and Tottenham Hotspur, there followed some compelling clashes between the two, with the Arsenal man usually winning out.

That was the thing with Dixon; on top of being a fierce competitor, he was a very cute learner. Give him a player to handle and he'd quickly suss him out. As for his passing ability, that improved under Arsène Wenger and, ironically, as his ageing legs restricted any overt attacking ideas, he became, in many ways, a much better defender. Like many of his generation, most notably Adams, the right-back was feeling increasingly comfortable on the ball and, with more options available, he rarely wasted possession. Wenger's new regime, incorporating inspirational methods of diet and fitness, had prolonged Dixon's career.

Remarkably, only at the end of his 14-year stint was his tenure at right-back seriously threatened. In the early years, he stood out as the one and only choice. Craig McKernon arrived from Mansfield Town as a possible alternative, but serious injury soon curtailed that particular challenge. Later on, Pål Lydersen signed up, but it soon became apparent that the big Norwegian was not up to the

task. Dixon was having none of it. The merest whiff of a challenge alerted his senses and he would visibly bridle at the thought of anyone snatching his place. In any case, he never really needed pushing because he could do that himself. Every morsel of motivation seemed to come from within. You cannot undersell such drive and ambition.

Dixon represents a very rare breed. Without doubt, he was a true Arsenal great who took immense pride and satisfaction from wearing the shirt for so long.

**Alan Smith**

# Boy Bastin

**Full name** Clifford Sydney Bastin

**Date of birth** March 14, 1912 (Exeter, England)

**Arsenal record** 396 appearances, 178 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 5 League titles, 2 FA Cups

He arrived at Highbury in 1929: spruce, sensible and 17. The commissioner immediately threw him out. "Well, sonny, you're a bit young at the moment," he said, not recognising 'Boy' Bastin who would go on to win two FA Cup winner's medals, five Championships and 21 England caps and be hailed as one of the greatest outside lefts who ever lived.

Cliff Bastin broke the mould. He was the winger who veered from the touchline. With a forward thrust of devastating speed, trickery, and pre-planned manoeuvres with the devilish Alex James, the young footballer wrecked the nerves, and playing lives, of innumerable right-backs deputed to mark him. He did not behave as they might expect. All set to block his passage down the touchline, they watched – bewildered – as he came inside instead. All readiness for a cross to a forward in the middle, they stumbled, thwarted, as he transformed himself into a striker.

In the 1932/1933 season, he played in all 42 League games and scored 33 goals, a record for an outside-left. He scored 178 goals in an Arsenal career that stretched over 17 years, one World War and 396 matches. It was a record that would stand for exactly 50 years, until broken by Ian Wright in 1997; Thierry Henry, in turn, beat Wright's tally of 185 goals in 2005. The dream would be to see Bastin and Henry playing together – both glorious goalscoring machines, both crafty creators of chances. Only one difference. If Henry adores London, with its designer shopping and Italian restaurants, Bastin was never entirely convinced.

"Don't ever go to London, Cliff," his grandmother used to say, seeing no definitive difference between England's capital and Sodom and Gomorrah. It is possible he would have acceded to her exhortation. He liked life in Exeter and



had no hankering for fame. But his fate was decided the day that Herbert Chapman saw him playing inside-left for Exeter at Watford while checking out another player, who was immediately forgotten in the excitement of uncovering such a treasure. The Arsenal manager was dazzled by Bastin's coolness, calculation, fierceness of shot, teasing of defenders and expertise at penalty taking. And when Chapman was dazzled, he also became determined.

Incredibly, Bastin was not over-impressed by the offer from Arsenal. The cool head did not rise in temperature at the thought of First Division football. But, sitting round the kitchen table at home, Chapman's enthusiasm and eloquence began to work on him. Bastin, having obtained his mother's blessing and Arsenal's permission to continue his electrical engineering studies, agreed. Then he went off to play tennis. "Sorry I'm late," he apologised when he arrived at the courts. "I've just been signing for Arsenal."

His career was one of extraordinary trajectory. Chapman was determined to play his new young star, once Bastin had gained entry past the reluctant commissionaire, but he felt he needed protection from the intimidating hoards of First Division tacklers. It was his brilliant battle plan to remodel Bastin as an outside-left. He told Bastin about the idea on Christmas Day, 1929. The boy was astounded: he had not played in the position since he was nine, and doubted he could accomplish anything from the outpost. "Mr Chapman, however, possessed an almost hypnotic power of persuasion," Bastin recalled years later. "By the time I left his office, I felt as if I had been an established outside-left for years."

The jigsaw was locking. Chapman wanted his wingers – Bastin on the left, Joe Hulme on the right – to subvert accepted practice. He wanted them to spring the element of surprise. Instead of beating the full-back and supplying crosses from the wing, the wily manager suggested they bamboozle their defenders, cut into midfield and go for goal themselves. With Alex James as the pivot, the pipeline of pinpoint forward passes, the high speed at which Arsenal could translate defence into attack was often decisive.

On every level, Bastin was Chapman's dream player. The manager nursed the belief that his footballers should hold a respectable place in society. At the time, compared to, say, tennis players, they were infinitely poorer paid and vastly less lauded by high society. James may have been an exception to the rule with his snazzy dress sense and London nightclubs, but Bastin was the ultimate professional. The first question Chapman asked the 17-year-old full-back, Eddie Hapgood, was: "Do you smoke or drink?" He never needed to ask Bastin.

He was still a teenager when he broke into international football, playing for the Football League against the Scottish League when he was only 19. Modest by nature, he once made a small joke about the fever of anticipation he suffered

whenever an England team was announced. Numbered 11, his was always the last name to be announced (there were no substitutes then).

Cool heads are needed for a Dream Team. Bastin's was the coolest, and he could cope with controversy. The most notorious match in which he ever played was the Germany v England friendly in 1938 in Berlin, when the England players were forced to perform the Nazi salute. He must have made an impression on them. During the Second World War, such was his fame, the Italian propaganda machine tried to use his 'capture' at the Battle of Crete in 1941 as a means of lowering the Allies' morale. It was a fairly useless gesture, however, when everyone in Britain almost certainly knew that 'Boy' Bastin was nowhere near Greece at the time. Excused military service because of his profound deafness, he spent the war as an ARP warden based on familiar territory – Highbury.

Neither Benito Mussolini's lies nor Adolf Hitler's Blitz proved lethal to his brilliant career; he suffered a more prosaic ending. Having been pained since 1935 by a left knee that frequently shifted out of joint, he suffered a right knee injury just before the War. He would never completely recover and in January 1947, after six post-War games for Arsenal, he retired. In a move inspired by the memory of his grandmother, he went back to Exeter and ran a pub.

**Sue Mott**

# Chippy

**Full name** William Liam Brady

**Date of birth** February 2, 1956 (Dublin, Ireland)

**Arsenal record** 307 appearances, 59 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 1 FA Cup

The slim, skilful figure of Liam Brady danced into the burly burlesque of 1970s British football, still reeling from the existence of Ron 'Chopper' Harris and his destructive friends. The son of a docker from Dublin, he was no brawny character himself. He specialised in smooth, beautifully balanced progress on the ball that could materialise into a goal at any moment. He was full of sleights and darts of movement, the master of disguise. He played the game with an Irish whimsy: a delight to watch, a nightmare to mark. He was light, but never lightweight; he could look after himself. Mentally, he was as tough as Peter Storey's old boots. That he went on after Highbury to play for four Italian clubs, including Juventus and Inter Milan, was proof enough of his survival instincts.

He arrived at Arsenal at the age of 15, shaped like a pipe cleaner, but already endowed with a left foot that could practically sign autographs. He had a natural ability, an affinity with football that convinced Arsenal's Irish scouting system his frame could withstand the rigours of top-flight English football. He made his League debut at 17, a £20-per-week professional, coming on as a substitute for Jeff Blockley and augmenting a team that still contained the residue of the triumphant Arsenal Double-winning team of 1971. Lesser talents would have been intimidated. Bob Wilson, Pat Rice, Bob McNab, Geordie Armstrong and John Radford were all on the field of play. Brady played what he himself called "a blinder".

It was the rebel in him. He always liked to surprise. He had been expelled from his school, St Aiden's Christian Brothers in Dublin, when the monks took a dim view of his being selected as captain of the Irish schoolboys in a football match in Wales as opposed to turning up for an important school Gaelic football match. Brady liked Gaelic football, but with elder brothers acting as role models,

there was a heavy genetic prod in the direction of football (Pat was at Millwall, Ray at Queens Park Rangers and Frank at Shamrock Rovers). Brady became part of an Irish wave that swept into Highbury, arriving near enough simultaneously with David O'Leary and Frank Stapleton. Defence, midfield and attack – a complete spine – had conveniently crossed the Irish Sea. Midfield would become Brady's particular domain, one he prowled with rare close control and elegant touch. But first they had to fill him with high-protein drinks.

The consumption of vats of body-building liquid was hardly the most glamorous of beginnings, but Brady's precocious talent surpassed any doubts about his size. He became a first-team regular, and a firm favourite in seven seasons at the Club. He played 307 games, scoring 59 goals, but the statistics scarcely do justice to his contribution: his significance was greater than a mere accumulation of numbers. Arsenal were suffering post-Double stress syndrome at the time; Brady was the antidote.

This was the time of Terry Neill's management. Bertie Mee, who left in April 1976, could not hide his tears as he announced his departure. A fastidious regime of old-fashioned virtues was replaced by a different beast. Neill's style of management fermented rebellion in the locker-room; transfer requests became routine and once, displeased by a display against Middlesbrough, Neill provoked even further heights of outrage by saying: "We could not have beaten 11 dustbins on that display." Through it all 'Chippy' Brady, though personally irritated, coaxed the team towards comparative success. Arsenal reached three successive Cup finals from 1978-1980, winning the one in the middle against Manchester United thanks to Brady manning the supply line. He was the architect of all three Arsenal goals and defied chronic exhaustion in the 88th minute at Wembley to make a surging run into the United half to help set up the tumultuous winning goal. They said at the time no player had made a greater singlehanded impression on the Wembley final since Sir Stanley Matthews in 1953.

He had been inspired by the 1-0 Cup Final defeat to Ipswich Town a year earlier, when thwarted by an ankle injury and Roger Osborne's winner 13 minutes from time. "Afterwards I wanted to get away from everybody. I cried my eyes out and simply could not stop," he says. That high-profile loss fuelled his competitive drive when the 1979 Cup Final dawned, but even Brady did not expect the winning goal. He was being less creative than pragmatic when he carried the ball deep into United territory in the last moments of normal time. He was playing for extra-time. Instead, he, Graham Rix and Alan Sunderland conspired to complete one of the most dramatic switchbacks of fortune Wembley crowds have ever seen. "God knows," Brady said. "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was the most emotional and satisfying moment of my career." He

was still only 23.

He was a prodigy, an exhibitionist, the fulcrum of the team. He was mischievously imaginative, and a bane to defenders who could look like a row of tailor's dummies as he weaved round them on the way to goal. Expect a shot and he would pass. Expect a pass and he could shoot, even from ridiculously deep-lying positions. It is only in the imagination that we can see him linking up with Cliff Bastin and Alex James, separated as they were by little more than 30 years. But it is worth summoning the thought of such a left-wing triumvirate – not a political movement, a pure football spectacular.

Taking into account his time in Italy, Brady ended up being away from Arsenal for 16 years, but in truth the bond was never severed. He returned to the Club as manager of the youth academy – a fitting place to find one of Arsenal's greatest young discoveries, in charge of the search for his successors.

**Sue Mott**

# Unrivalled

**Full name** Patrick Donalé Vieira

**Date of birth** June 23, 1976 (Dakar, Senegal)

**Arsenal record** 406 appearances, 33 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 3 League titles, 4 FA Cups

Any discussion about the most influential player in the history of the English game, over the longest period of sustained success, must take in Patrick Vieira. It could be claimed that the reign of the tall, lissom Frenchman born in Senegal was without peer from 1996-2005. Although Arsenal failed to deliver on the European field, Vieira's tally was three Premiership titles and four FA Cup wins in his nine seasons.

Vieira, who had played for three seasons for Cannes, arrived at Highbury at 20 from AC Milan, where he had spent one season. The midfielder was signed on the recommendation of Arsène Wenger, who at that time had not yet left his post in Japan, but was an imminent appointment by Arsenal, who had constantly supplied him with video reports on the gifted French youngster. Under the direction of manager George Graham and then, briefly, Bruce Rioch, the Club had constantly lacked the truly creative touch that had previously been exercised by Liam Brady. Graham's successes – winning the old First Division title in 1989 and 1991 – had been labelled boring. The Highbury faithful longed for another artist and now he arrived in the shape of Vieira.

Physically powerful, technically brilliant and possessing a tactical vision of everything both in front of and behind him, he transformed the picture at Highbury, in conjunction with the debonair Frenchman who became the Club's first foreign coach. After only seven games in charge, and following a 3-1 derby victory over Tottenham Hotspur, Wenger gave an illuminating press conference at which he was questioned over Vieira's creativity. "What is creative?" he asked rhetorically. "For me, being creative is scoring goals. That is why, for me, beauty is efficiency. It is not about making nice movements. The crowd love him because he does the right thing at the right moment, not just because he's

beautiful to watch."

Not the least of Vieira's assets was that canny ability, common to all great players, to play the game at what seemed to be his own speed. Where it exists, the deception is wonderfully attractive since, while appearing to stroll, the player is always there first. Arsenal's potency at this time had been increased by the arrival, in 1997, of compatriot Emmanuel Petit, another player with refined vision and technique. On the occasion of Arsenal inflicting a 4-1 defeat on Sunderland, the opposition's then-manager, Peter Reid, confessed: "The problem we have with Vieira and Petit is that they are six feet tall, can pass, can head, can tackle, can do everything." Vieira at his peak was unmatched, equally deft at ball-winning and pass-making.

An element that so intimidated any opposition was Vieira's capacity as warrior-technician, a player who fearlessly won tackles – though on occasion he could be excessively physical – while simultaneously being the most refined player on the pitch. However foolish his occasional acquisition of a red card and the wrath of a referee, it would have no impact on his ability to play like an angel in the next game. This happened, for instance, at the start of the 2000/2001 season. Sent off in consecutive matches against Sunderland and Liverpool, within days he was the maestro once more in a 5-3 destruction of Charlton Athletic, exhibiting breathtaking virtuosity. Wenger was moved to say: "I'm pleased ... not only because he's a great player, but mentally his response was great ... some people asked me if I'd thought of leaving him out, but I answered 'Not for a minute'. I know how strong this guy is mentally."

The following autumn, Vieira was guilty of an outburst against referee Andy D'Urso which resulted in a £25,000 fine, bringing his penalties from the FA through six separate incidents to a total of £100,000. That red card was Vieira's eighth. It had been a mixed year for him. While on the one hand Arsenal had achieved the Double of League and Cup for the second time under Wenger, comfortably defeating Chelsea in the FA Cup Final, they had foundered against Deportivo La Coruña and Juventus in the Champions League.

His occasional red mists were in contrast to the gentleness of his personality off the field. Appointed captain upon the retirement of Adams, Vieira was transformed from the shy, occasionally difficult man in the dressing room during his early Highbury years. His selfconfidence had risen to the point where there was a quiet arrogance in his demeanour, and he now had that vein of leadership to which the rest of the dressing room responded. At last he was gaining some control over the intermittent moments of impetuosity. In an interview early in 2004, Vieira admitted: "I'm embarrassed when I look back at some of the things I did before. A role model? Definitely not a few years ago. But I changed,

changed a lot since I first came to the UK. I had some experiences in my life which made me improve as a player, and improve a lot as a human being." A little-known aspect of Vieira's life is that he was a prominent founding figure of the Diambars initiative in Dakar, Senegal, the city of his birth, which provides education and a football academy for boys.

Repeatedly there was talk of his departure, the rumours usually surrounding Real Madrid, but Vieira swore his loyalty. He remained for the FA Cup victory over Southampton in 2003, the recapture of the League title the following year, and FA Cup triumph again in 2005 in a penalty shoot-out against Manchester United. In that match, Arsenal had been often outplayed, with José Antonio Reyes dismissed for a second yellow card, but somehow Arsenal had hung on. Now the moment came when Vieira had one kick to win the day, one kick to earn Arsène Wenger and his Club their 10th Cup victory. He duly drove the ball home, the last gesture by a football giant who had garnered so much glory for himself and his club over nine seasons.

**David Miller**



# The ringmaster

**Full name** Alexander Wilson James

**Date of birth** September 14, 1901 (Lanarkshire, Scotland)

**Arsenal record** 261 appearances, 27 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 4 League titles, 2 FA Cups

Alex James did not just play at Highbury, he conducted the orchestra. He was the entertainer, the ringmaster, the maestro of Arsenal's world-renowned team of show-stoppers during the 1930s. He was Herbert Chapman's answer to the role of the ultimate playmaker.

The little Scot from Lanarkshire with the baggy shorts and neatly oiled centre parting would be a perfect Dream Team creator. He was no more than 5ft 6in tall, but what he lacked in height, he more than compensated for by the breadth of his ambition on the ball. His impudence and invention knew no bounds. He was the King of Highbury at the time, and ruled his kingdom from a position behind the forwards, radiating passes to either wing and confounding opponents with his trickery. He turned Chapman's defensively strong formation into something entirely more crowd-pleasing, heart-stopping and whimsical. Highbury adored him. Even the critics adored him: "His footwork is entrancing and amazingly deft," one admiring London newspaper said. "Many times he drives the spectators into gales of laughter by the tricks he plays on opponents and the nonchalant way in which he performs them."

He was a conjuror, a comedian and a leader all at the same time. Bill Shankly, a fellow Scot and opponent who would go on to manage Liverpool so charismatically, called him "a genius" and "a nightmare to play against". Certainly, he abounded in confidence. "Nobody had greater faith in the qualities of Alex James than Alex James himself," his far more self-effacing partner on the left, Cliff Bastin, noted. He was a model of self-belief, a commodity that would be supplied by sports psychologists in the future. But, between the wars, it was life – or the withstanding of it – that bred mental toughness. It was a hard life in the industrial town of Bellshill, southern Scotland, as one of six children. At first

the signs were not too bright. "There's not enough fat on Wee 'Eck to fry an egg," his father, a stern, abstemious churchgoer and worker on the old Caledonian Railway, said.

Yet while Wee 'Eck, his father's pet name for Alex, may not have been bullishly proportioned, his sumptuous skill on the ball made him popular with local teams. He played for Orbiston Celtic as a teenager, in Sir Matt Busby's home village, a place of such fearsome reputation that it was known as 'Cannibal's Island'. From those experiences, James learned evasion, perhaps downright survival. By the time he had risen up the ranks from Orbiston to Ashfield Juniors to Raith Rovers, James had a reputation for amazing talent and infuriating selfishness. Still so small they called him "The We'an", he had the cheek of a dozen men. He even said so himself. "I was a cussed little fellow in those days," he said.

He moved to England, to Second Division Preston North End. It was a gruelling league, filled with burly defenders and rugged tackles. On Christmas Day, in 1928, his festivities included walking a mile through the ice-cold sea water on Blackpool Beach in an effort to sooth his battered ankles. On the pitch, he could beat his opposite numbers with ease, but, much of the time, he bamboozled his own team-mates as well. His speed of thought was far too quick for his more lumbering comrades. He needed a team in which his unorthodox play and fast-forward mind would flourish.

Enter Chapman. Arsenal needed a player whose visionary reading of the game would build their attacks; James needed a stage. In 1929, James moved to Highbury in a blaze of publicity, following Scotland's 5-1 demolition of England at Wembley the previous year. James scored twice in that match. He was nearly a star and Arsenal would make him the brightest presence on any football field in the country.

But first, the settling in. It wasn't easy. He was 28, in his prime, but his new role behind the Arsenal forward line, with defensive duties thrown in, was an adjustment too far for the Scot. He balked at the workload and said so in his column in (aptly) *The Star* newspaper: "The First Division inside forward cannot possibly do all that is expected of him, ie donkey work, fetching and carrying, initiating all attacks, falling back and defending. I say frankly it cannot be done." He was wrong, as it turned out, and ultimately bowed to the manager's wider view. Chapman was man enough to hold his nerve. He maintained his belief in James as his link man. It was difficult. James was unfit – so much so that it was trainer Tom Whittaker's private belief that the Scot was an "out-and-out crock". Having examined James's legs, Whittaker could not find a bruise on them, despite a great deal of guttural complaint in an almost impenetrable Glaswegian

accent. Then the trainer looked again and discovered the problem: it was all darkened bruise, from knee to ankle. Whittaker re-evaluated: "He was a great-hearted little man."

That heart, and the arrival of Cliff 'Boy' Bastin, eventually transformed his Highbury experience. Bastin was the perfect forward-going foil on the left. Joe Hulme raced along the wing on the right. Both were supplied with ammunition by the all-seeing eyes and two-footed wizardry of the master of the midfield. In their first season together, Arsenal won the FA Cup against Huddersfield Town and the architect of the first goal was, naturally, James. He had thought up the move on the team bus on the way to the ground and confided his plan to the teenager, Bastin. If Arsenal gained a free kick near the Huddersfield penalty area, James would surprise the defence by taking it quickly, passing the ball wide to Bastin, who was to draw a defender before playing the ball back to James. Free of a close marker, James promised to score. He did. A second goal was created by a through-ball to centre-forward Jack Lambert, again the work of James, and Arsenal won the Cup, 2-0.

His multiple talents blossomed. Arsenal won three successive Championships and went on to become the most famous Club in the world before the intervention of the Second World War. At the heart of their dominance, the root of their greatness, was the brilliance of James. The last word goes to Bastin: "Memories of a shuffling, puckish little figure, trousers down to his knees and shirt-sleeves flapping loose, will be treasured to the very end."

**Sue Mott**

# DB10

**Full name** Dennis Nicolaas Maria Bergkamp  
**Date of birth** May 10, 1969 (Amsterdam, Holland)  
**Arsenal record** 423 appearances, 120 goals  
**Honours with Arsenal** 3 League titles, 4 FA Cups

Possibly, indeed probably, Dennis Bergkamp the footballer was not entirely human. With his angelic looks and visionary game, 'The Iceman' seemed hewn from supernatural stock whose source was not Ajax at all, but inter-planetary. When he arrived in the summer of 1995, Arsenal fans would have been justified in scanning the skies as opposed to the mouth of the Channel Tunnel. But they accepted the story that he had arrived from Italy where he had endured two unsettling years at Inter Milan, wrestling with defensive football and man-toman markers. For a man named after Denis Law (although his parents added an extra 'n'), this was no way for the game to be played.

He cost Arsenal considerably less than £10million; with hindsight the fans at Highbury might think 10 times that would have been a bargain for a player who changed their world. He was finessed into a team that had been only recently lambasted for playing football of a bludgeoning, instead of beautiful, kind. Bergkamp was a creative force the like of which Highbury had rarely seen before and he came in his prime, rather than as an ornament or a tourist, and he swiftly laid claim to the title "greatest foreign import to British football".

Although signed by Bruce Rioch during his brief reign as Arsenal manager, Bergkamp was more perfectly suited to Rioch's successor. Arsène Wenger was the professor, perfecting the ingredients for his high-grade attacking game, and Bergkamp was his catalyst. Together they created a revolution. Arsenal became purveyors of 'The Beautiful Game'. It was more than cosmetic surgery. It was a rebirth.

It helped that Bergkamp was Dutch, that he played for Ajax under Johan Cruyff, that he arrived in full command of his talent, that he was intelligent and that he grew up adoring the passion of English football. (He was a Glenn Hoddle

fan in his youth. He once bought a Tottenham Hotspur shirt during a holiday in Great Yarmouth with his parents, but mercifully the episode left no lasting impression.) But it was more than that. It was as though the Dutchman had an almost spiritual understanding of football: as a venture, as an entertainment, and yet as a thoroughly professional business. No one trained harder. He walked into a dressing room where some players were succeeding in a fight against their inner demons and some were conducting schoolboy pranks such as cutting up team-mates' underpants with scissors. Bergkamp was a different breed.

It took seven games for him to score his first goal, by which time the press was exerting no little pressure on him. When it came, against Southampton, it was a classic one-touch, 12-yard volley, demonstrating the apparently nonchalant adeptness that Highbury would come to admire to the point of worship. It was followed shortly afterwards by an inexorable run past several defenders and the thunderclap of a 25-yard drive. Oh yes, this was a special one. Bergkamp seemed to play on a different surface from mere Earthlings. So ghostly were his runs, so sleight his movements, he seemed to be running on ice and air. Smooth and subtle, he could be a ruthless striker one minute and a brush-stroke artist the next. Sometimes he was both at once.

Statistical evidence shows that during Arsenal's 1997/1998 Double-winning season, Arsenal's No 10 achieved the rare feat of being placed first, second and third in the BBC's Goal of the Month competition. Two were from the Leicester City match at Filbert Street, where he scored a hat-trick of majestic elegance. The Iceman was on fire. The third goal against Leicester presaged the one he would score for Holland against Argentina in the 1998 World Cup. Millions rubbed their eyes in disbelief. The control was too exquisite, the touch too refined, the intelligence too mischievous, the finish too clinical. Whether the opponents were flailing, exotic Argentinians or poor, scorched Matt Elliott of Leicester, the outcome was the same. At Leicester, the score was 3-2 to the home side when the ball came down to him lurking on the left edge of the penalty area. He killed it dead with one touch of his right foot, evaded his marker with one brush of the left and commanded the ball to curl round the goalkeeper with one more lethal stroke of his right. "He's a player who gets close to perfection," said Wenger of Dennis and his exquisite menace.

The story of Bergkamp involved massive contradictions. So suited to Arsenal in Europe and yet so rarely in action there. So apparently calm and cool, yet afraid to fly. This arose from the 1994 World Cup when a false bomb alert on the aircraft which was carrying the Dutch team spooked him. He never renounced that decision, once making a 1,000-mile round trip to Bayer Leverkusen by road, only to sit on the bench.

Another compelling mystery was his riled side. He could be swift in retribution, swift to the point of getting his retaliation in first. To Arsenal fans, this contrast just made him more intriguing. His team-mates didn't care. Their admiration was profound. "Dennis, he's unbelievable," said Ashley Cole, the Arsenal left-back who drew many a benefit from Bergkamp's creative generosity. "I don't think there's ever been a player with the vision that he's got. I don't think there ever will be. He's by far the best I've ever seen. It's almost like he's not quite human. Some of the balls he gives to me are incredible. So are some of the things he does in training."

Age diminished the powers of the Dutchman, but by fractions that made his presence still attractive to the team and a danger to opponents. His fiendish stealth remained, his speed of thought was just as fast, even if the legs that carried him to his destination were slower. Wenger once said that a player was past his prime at 30. Bergkamp would retire at 37. That was a trophy in itself. It was divinely appropriate that Highbury and Bergkamp should reach the end of their Arsenal careers simultaneously. Born at very different times, they both leave a legacy of picturesque memories.

**Sue Mott**

# Thierry

**Full name** Thierry Daniel Henry

**Date of birth** August 17, 1977 (Essonne, France)

**Arsenal record** 370 appearances, 226 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 2 League titles, 3 FA Cups

A predator with manners. A panther in human guise. The most prolific goalscorer in Highbury's history, a man who actually started his career as a left-winger. Full of contrasts, the little boy who grew up in a Parisian concrete jungle and graduated to become one of the world's greatest strikers on a manicured green field in north London.

Goalscorer, goal provider, record breaker: in January 2005 Thierry Henry equalled Cliff Bastin's record of 150 League goals for the Gunners in a 7-0 defeat of Middlesbrough. His contribution to the game, as ever, went beyond numbers. Mastery on the ball, unpredictability with it, two artistic feet and terrifying directness. "Seven-Up", "Simply The Bast!" and "Henry's Virtuoso Performance a Highlight in Highbury History" were among the headlines.

You might be tempted to think that the Hand of God, so notoriously borrowed by Maradona, also had a hand in the creation of the talents of Henry. His manager certainly thought so. "Thierry is amazing. A dream you want as a player. Such power. Sometimes you say that God has not given you everything, but with Thierry he has been given the lot," said Arsène Wenger in one of his many fulsome tributes to Arsenal's record goalscorer. But, though no one can rule out divine intervention in the case of the Frenchman, his power, pace, grace, passion, aggression, tremendous close control and a dash of mischievous trickery may owe more to mortal interference: his father, his Frenchness, his friend Dennis Bergkamp and the free-thinking vision of his manager have all helped lay the foundations. It began, not with God, but his father, Toni, so passionate on behalf of his talented son that he once provoked the abandonment of a junior league game in Paris by running onto the pitch and becoming involved in a punch-up. Henry's commitment sprang from such roots.

The refinement came from the French Football Academy at Clairefontaine where, alongside Nicolas Anelka, Louis Saha, David Trézéguet and William Gallas, he learnt his craft and work ethic. But perhaps the greatest influence of all came from Wenger, very briefly his manager at Monaco before they resumed their relationship later in their careers at Highbury. Wenger disagreed with every other professional football manager for whom Henry would play, including the coaches of France. "You are not a leftwinger," he told the teenager when they first converged at Monaco. "You are a Number 9." Years later, Wenger would have the chance to put his philosophy into practice.

The conversion at Highbury was initially painful. When the 21-year-old Henry was signed from Juventus in August 1999 for a bargain price, the vice chairman David Dein handed him a video. It was a compilation of Ian Wright's goals for Arsenal. Not quite all 185 of them, but enough to send a message. "That's what you have to do," Dein said with a smile. "No pressure." It was pressure, though. It was also a new position and adapting his attacking style had its teething problems. When he made his Arsenal debut at Highbury against Leicester City, he came on as substitute and wastefully missed three chances in 20 minutes through, essentially, surprise. "Lack of composure," his manager called it. Vieira tried to soothe his sore feelings with laughter in the dressing room afterwards. The Arsenal fans, perhaps less jokingly, wondered whether the winger would convert to a lethal striker after all.

Yet a footballer with his gifts, allied to determination and baptised by the fire that the Premiership represents, would soon toughen up. Literally. "In my first match here, I received blows from everywhere. I was flying about. I was wondering where I had landed. Players were falling all over the place. It was a real battleground." To complement this process, he had team-mate Martin Keown carrying on the mayhem in training. "He was always after me," Henry said. "Sometimes to the point where I thought he had something against me." No, it was just a service. A 'Welcome to Britain' medley of bruises, meant in the nicest possible way.

And so 'Titi' Henry, the boy who had to share his father's football boots because money was so tight, evolved into one of the most devastating attacking forces the game has ever seen. When the French world champions added the 2000 European Championship to their tally of precious metal, Michel Platini, a Gallic hero himself, said this: "Thierry Henry has impressed me the most. He has the pace of Anelka, and the sense of Trézéguet. He's got something no other French player has ever had. He can do everything, from scoring goals to giving assists, crossing and creating space for other players, and he fights for every ball. I've never seen a player in France like him."



At Highbury, the laughter had changed to gasps. Henry was simply adored, for playing with heart as much as his silken skills. A true team player who creates as many chances as he scores, arrant selfishness was never his style. "I am nothing without my team-mates. I cannot score a goal by myself. I am only there to finish the job of the team. You cannot have the individual ahead of the collective. Never."

For all his Hollywood looks and smouldering delivery of the line "Va-Va-Voom" in the famous car adverts, Henry has never succumbed to showy arrogance. He's cool, but never conceited; he can score three and mind about the fourth that got away. His role models were all steeped in modesty, from Marco van Basten, whom he admired so much at Monaco, to Bergkamp, whose graceful subtleties so matched his own. He is no shy, retiring soul, and his passion is often evident – he was even sent off once after the game had finished, for swearing, though this was a rare occurrence. – but his outbursts of speed have been far more significant than those of temper.

Above all, Henry is an intelligent player. Bright enough, even as a teenager, to seek correct revenge when they replayed that junior league game interrupted by his volcanic father, the only aggression he applied was to the ball. His side won 2-1; he scored both goals.

He has always learnt quickly. And completely. "When I have the ball I know it's mine," he once said. It is the ultimate expression of his mastery. For the time the ball dances along with his feet, it's not just a partnership, it's a possession.

**Sue Mott**

# The big man

**Full name** Alfred John Kelsey

**Date of birth** November 19, 1929 (Llansamlet, Wales)

**Arsenal record** 352 appearances, 0 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 1 League title

Jack Kelsey, who vies with David Seaman and Pat Jennings as Arsenal's most accomplished goalkeeper, was big in every sense: in physique, at 6ft, in his intimidation of forwards and in his temperamental equilibrium. He was not spectacular, in the manner of others of his time such as Frank Swift, of Manchester City, or Charlton Athletic's Sam Bartram, but excelled through his positional sense.

Between 1949 and 1962, Kelsey made 327 appearances for Arsenal, and was custodian for Wales in all but three out of 44 matches from 1954-1962, when his career was ended by a back injury prior to the World Cup Finals in Chile. His overriding authority behind his 10 colleagues was worth the proverbial one-goal advantage. "In the dressing room, he was the governor," Mel Charles, his Wales team-mate, recalls. "We would listen to him, in effect saluting him. You never saw Jack flustered." Less conventional was his addiction to cigarettes. Charles remembers his astonishment, on a foreign summer tour, at seeing Kelsey taking a leisurely swim in the hotel pool, complete with cigarette between his lips. "When we played Brazil in Rio the following year," he says. "Jack had a packet of five Woodbines in his cap behind one of the posts. Not that against Pelé he had much time for a fag."

Admiration for Kelsey is uniform. Cliff Jones, a fellow Swansea boy, says: "Jack had the strongest pair of hands I've ever seen. He'd strengthened them during his apprentice days in a smelting ironworks at Swansea." Contemporaries recall that in training Kelsey would stand back several feet away from the goalline and fling himself upwards and forwards until those huge hands could, without fail, hold his weight while clinging to the crossbar. His weakness, oddly, was that he was a poor kicker of the ball; so conscious was Kelsey of this

limitation that he loved to play centre-forward in practice matches; his celebrations when he scored a goal were something to behold.

Born at Llansamlet just outside Swansea, Kelsey kept goal from his school days, and left school at 14 to enlist at the steelworks prior to National Service. On de-mob, he returned to play in the Swansea and District League. In the last match of the 1948/1949 season – missing a cousin's 21st birthday party to play – he saved two penalties. After the game he was approached by Len Morris, a former Arsenal junior, who had taken the second penalty. With some hesitancy, Kelsey allowed Morris to contact Highbury and, following trials, he signed for the Club.

Initially understudy to George Swindin, he made his debut in his second season, 1950/1951, but by 1953/1954 his front-rank position was established, and he earned his first international cap against Northern Ireland at Wrexham. Wales qualified, for the first and as yet only time, for the World Cup Finals of 1958 in Sweden. In a side which performed above themselves throughout, Kelsey was one of many heroes. In five matches – against Mexico, Hungary and Sweden in the first round, then a play-off against Hungary and a losing quarter-final against Brazil – he conceded only three goals. The last of these, which took eventual winners Brazil into the semi-final, came from an emerging teenager by the name of Pelé.

Four years later, aged 33, Kelsey was still at the peak of his form, and such was Wales' reputation that Brazil invited them to play two friendlies prior to the World Cup Finals. Heroics by Kelsey helped keep the margin to 3-1 in each match, but towards the end of the second game in São Paulo, an innocent collision with Vavá resulted in the blow to Kelsey's spine that brought a premature end to his illustrious career.

**David Miller**

# Spider

**Full name** David Anthony O'Leary

**Date of birth** May 2, 1958 (London, England)

**Arsenal record** 722 appearances, 14 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 2 League titles, 2 FA Cups

By the time he left in 1993, David O'Leary had managed to weave himself into the very fabric of Arsenal. He seemed part of the furniture, a veritable institution, having seen and done it all over the course of 20 years.

Making his debut at 17 under Bertie Mee, the rangy centre-half went on to play for another three managers, but it was only when his final one, George Graham, paired Steve Bould with Tony Adams as part of a new-look back four, that the Irishman finally stood down from his regular first-team berth. Even then, however, he played an important role. Towards the end of the 1988-1989 season, Graham switched tack, deploying the veteran in a three-man defence. Fittingly, an emotional O'Leary, with his father watching in the stands, stayed on until the end of the Anfield title decider to finally pick up a Championship medal after what felt like an eternity of trying. The tears flowed freely that night. It had been a long haul.

Yet the previous 14 years, on a personal level at least, had been marked by a remarkable degree of consistency from a naturally supple athlete who rarely got injured. Known universally as "Paddy" or "Spider" (due to his long legs), the defender's awkward running style disguised a sharp turn of pace that fooled many opponents. On top of that, he was incredibly difficult to beat in a straight one-on-one, rarely committing himself by going to ground. Great mobility and canny positioning kept him in good shape.

Off the pitch, too, O'Leary seemed to have everything sewn up. I will never forget his parting words one day when my Leicester team hosted Arsenal. "See you soon," he said, as we shook hands at the end. At that stage, courted by a number of clubs, I wasn't even sure myself where I'd end up. O'Leary was. Having been around for so long, he knew more than most about Highbury's

inner workings. George Graham would tap into the football side of that knowledge via regular chats at the front of the team bus, confiding in a player who later became his assistant at Leeds. O'Leary, in turn, would offer his opinion. Not many could rival his vast playing experience, which included 68 caps for the Republic of Ireland.

O'Leary was regarded by everyone at Highbury as a tremendous competitor who had shown unswerving loyalty and commitment over two decades. It takes something special to survive for that long at such a demanding place. To this day, he holds the club record for the most appearances. In an increasingly transient profession, 722 first-class games is a record that may never be bettered.

**Alan Smith**

# Perpetual motion

**Full name** Joseph Mercer

**Date of birth** August 9, 1914 (Ellesmere Port, England)

**Arsenal record** 275 appearances, 2 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 2 League titles, 1 FA Cup

The bonhomie of Joe Mercer, not quick-fire cocksure, but gentle and modest, camouflaged an unyielding will. As a wing-half with a seemingly frail physique, he was a relentless tackler, his legs sometimes unable to live up to the demands of his ambition. Here was a player, and at Arsenal a captain, whose spirit, courage and determination infected not just his team, but every supporter who followed Arsenal. His equanimity stemmed partly from the fact that, in an era of a restrictive, maximum wage, he had the financial security of a family grocery business on Merseyside in which he was heavily involved when not training or playing. He was, moreover, like Eddie Hapgood, a non-smoker, and only an occasional drinker.

His motivation – morning, noon and night – was the sheer joy of football. "Money does not enter into it," he would say, "and I know for a fact that most footballers play to win whether or not there is a bonus."

Born at Ellesmere Port in 1914, Mercer had played for Cheshire Schools in the same side as Stan Cullis, later renowned as manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers. His father had been a professional footballer with Nottingham Forest before World War I, but his influential mother, recognising the game's easy but potentially misleading appeal to a young boy, had decreed that he should play half-a-dozen games for Everton's reserves before she approved of him signing amateur forms. It was another three years before he signed as a professional, aged 19, for £5 a week. That was "real money", as he recalled, "as you could sign up in those days for as little as 30 shillings [£1.50] a week".

He helped Everton win the League title in 1939 and played in all five of England's international matches that season. But although he appeared in 27 wartime internationals, he was not capped again afterwards, being inaccurately

perceived to be past his peak.

Tom Whittaker, shortly to succeed George Allison as Arsenal manager, tempted Mercer to move to Highbury in November 1946, for £7,000. Whittaker, still by nature more physio than manager, also persuaded Mercer to adjust his style of play, and become more defensive. His instinctive attacking play was exhausting him, leaving gaps at the back which he could no longer cover. Mercer continued to live on the Wirral, at Hoylake, so as to maintain involvement in the grocery business, training between times either at Liverpool's Anfield ground, on Royal Liverpool Golf Course, or at the beach on the sands. The train journeys down to matches at Highbury he regarded as relaxation.

Arsenal's rehabilitation under the leadership of Whittaker and Mercer continued apace: they established a new Club record of being undefeated in their first 17 games of the 1947/1948 season, the run ending in November at Derby County, although Arsenal went on to claim the League title. They added another in 1953, watched by an average attendance of 54,982. All season Mercer played like a man inspired, never more so than in the final, crucial game at home to Burnley in torrential rain. "I never went across the half-way line," Mercer recalled. "On occasion, I had every member of the team back in defence. It was as tense as a Cup Final."

Arsenal's 2-0 destruction of Liverpool at Wembley in 1950 was comprehensive. It was less happy at Wembley two years later against Newcastle United, although Mercer was moved to say, after an injury-hit Arsenal team played their hearts out: "I always thought football's greatest honour was to captain England. I was wrong – it was to captain Arsenal today." He would often refer in later years to this having been his finest moment, that he was prouder of defeat in his second final than he was of victory over Liverpool in the first.

**David Miller**

# Geordie

**Full name** George Armstrong

**Date of birth** August 9, 1944 (Hebburn, England)

**Arsenal record** 621 appearances, 68 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 1 League title, 1 FA Cup, 1 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup

Geordie Armstrong was renowned as one of the hardest-working players ever to take his place on a football pitch. When trying to break into Arsenal's first team in the mid-1960s, teenage striker John Radford remembers being given this bit of advice by his landlord, who watched every Arsenal game: "Don't worry about the crowd," he said. "If you want to win them over, just do what George Armstrong does – run your nuts off."

You couldn't argue with that. Having established himself in the side a few years earlier, Armstrong's appetite for hard work knew no bounds. The little winger never seemed to stop moving, popping up in such unlikely places on the pitch that opponents would often joke that his mother must have had identical triplets, all playing for Arsenal. Radford, meanwhile, soon found out to his benefit that there was much more to the left-winger's game than sheer hard graft. "Geordie" could do everything required of a top-class wide man: beat his opponent for pace or skill, cross on the run or land the ball on a sixpence and he had an uncanny instinct for making the right choice. A matter of seconds later, though, he could be seen funnelling back to help out Bob McNab, his grateful full-back who, in turn, would venture forward knowing that his tireless accomplice would sit in and cover.

Armstrong had stamina and speed, a valuable combination of which he was fiercely protective. Consider the time Peter Marinello arrived in a blaze of publicity. The Arsenal lads mischievously suggested that the nippy Scot now represented the fastest player at the Club. A suitably riled Armstrong demanded a showdown. Marinello was reluctantly wheeled out right there and then and comfortably lost a head-to-head sprint.

Such competitive spirit helped the determined 16-year-old, who came down



from County Durham in 1961, to hold down a place for 15 full seasons. By the end of that time he had totted up 621 first-class games, which was a Club record; his total has been surpassed only by David O'Leary, with 722 games, and Tony Adams, 669. Arsenal to the core, Armstrong was reserve team coach at Highbury when a brain haemorrhage ended his life, aged 56, in November 2000 at the London Colney training ground.

An ever-present in 1970/1971, his finest hour stretched right across that glorious Double campaign. It was from Geordie's accurate cross that Ray Kennedy's header clinched the title at Tottenham Hotspur – the umpteenth time that term he had set up one of his strikers. A few days later, his ceaseless inspiration and endeavour kept Liverpool guessing in the FA Cup Final.

**Alan Smith**

# Indestructible

**Full name** Edward Joseph Drake

**Date of birth** August 16, 1912 (Southampton, England)

**Arsenal record** 184 appearances, 139 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 2 League titles, 1 FA Cup

Physical courage has always been a characteristic of outstanding English footballers, and never was there a braver player than Ted Drake, the best of Arsenal's centre-forwards in the Glorious Thirties. Scornful of injuries, seemingly immune to pain, sometimes carried off semi-conscious yet still returning to the field, he scored 123 goals in 168 First Division appearances for Arsenal between 1934 and 1939. The phrase 'running through a brick wall' was probably coined to describe Drake, and his exploits contributed spectacularly to the second and third of Arsenal's three consecutive League titles from 1933-35 and to another in 1937/1938. Additionally, he scored the only goal in the FA Cup Final victory over Sheffield United in 1936. Injuries limited his appearances for England to five, in which he nonetheless scored six times including a hat-trick against Hungary, in a match that was played at Highbury on December 2, 1936. He was also one of seven Arsenal players involved in a bloodthirsty encounter with Italy at Highbury in 1934.

Drake remains best known for a remarkable achievement in December 1935 at Villa Park, notwithstanding that he ran on to the field with his left knee heavily bandaged from an earlier strain. Two days previously he had visited George Allison – the manager who had signed him from Southampton following the death of Herbert Chapman in 1934 – who was unwell in hospital. Allison had quipped that he would feel better if Drake ensured two points from the meeting with Aston Villa. Drake did rather better. He scored all seven goals in a 7-1 victory. The tally was even more unusual in that he had only eight shots, the first six all goals, the seventh hitting the crossbar prior to the eighth, which again found the net. This equalled the Football League feat achieved by James Ross of Preston North End in 1888, the first year of the competition, a total surpassed

only by players in lower divisions and a record for any League match away from home.

Drake's flourish was a disaster for Villa, who had spent a fortune on buying players in a fight against relegation, and it was with unstated reluctance that he subsequently scored the only goal in the return fixture in April which committed Villa to the Second Division for the first time in their history.

Recklessly courageous, Drake epitomised that breed of centre-forward that had developed after the introduction of the defensive centre-half role, the so-called third-back game, following a change in the offside law in 1925. Defences were there to be bludgeoned into submission, and Drake, powerfully built, held nothing back. His career began with Southampton Schoolboys, then progressed to Winchester City. Becoming a meter inspector's apprentice with the local gas company, he was spotted by Southampton, and scored 48 goals in 72 League appearances before signing for Arsenal for £6,500.

Yet Drake's talent was initially most in evident in cricket. At 19, he had opened for Hampshire and shared in a stand of 86 with that renowned left-hander Phil Mead, against Glamorgan. His sturdy physique belied his temperament: his early shyness made him initially uncertain about the idea of a move to London, but once he arrived he swiftly became a new idol for the crowd. His seven goals in the remaining 10 fixtures in 1934 helped ensure that Arsenal retained their League title, and his 42 goals in 41 appearances effectively made certain of Arsenal's hat-trick in 1935, in addition to making him the League's top scorer.

During the war Drake served in the RAF as a Flight Lieutenant and it was there that he suffered a back injury during physical training which led to his retirement as a player shortly after the game recommenced. He moved into management, eventually winding up at Chelsea, until that time the subject of much music-hall jest, and led them to their first League championship in 1955.

**David Miller**

# Ian Wright Wright Wright

**Full name** Ian Edward Wright

**Date of birth** November 3, 1963 (London, England)

**Arsenal record** 288 appearances, 185 goals

**Honours with Arsenal** 2 League titles, 2 FA Cups, 1 League Cup

From the very first time he appeared in an Arsenal shirt, Ian Wright was destined to become a firm favourite. Yet nobody present at Filbert Street on a mild September evening in 1991 to see the debut boy notch his first goal could possibly have predicted what was to come. By the time he had broken Cliff Bastin's goalscoring record, and after scoring 185 goals overall, this deadly predator had claimed a large chunk of Highbury folklore.

That first goal against Leicester City, an ambitious effort from outside the box, was typical of the man. He would try his luck from anywhere, encouraged by a sixth sense for the tightest of openings, aided by finishing skills second to none. Wright possessed a rare knack for knowing when to pull the trigger, when to catch a goalkeeper off guard with a razorsharp strike. It is difficult, in fact, to think of a striker competing in the same era blessed with quite so much natural ability in front of goal. Whichever way the chance came – be it on his right or left foot, up in the air or down among the dangerous muck and bullets – this fearless competitor didn't give a damn. He'd do whatever was necessary to feed an insatiable addiction. Wright lived for goals, he couldn't get enough. The feeling sent him crazy every day.

By way of proof, this effervescent Londoner, as loud as they come, celebrated scoring in training with just the same zest as he did on a matchday. The session was put on hold as the ecstatic scorer took off, waving his arms, roaring with joy on a lively lap of honour. This first became a familiar sight during the mid-1990s, when everything revolved around the aggressive goal-getter. 1-0 to the Arsenal – you can guess who usually scored, backed up by a defence that had forgotten how to concede.

Playing alongside team-mates with two League Championship medals on the

sideboard, nobody was hungrier for success than the former building site labourer who had joined the professional ranks relatively late when signing for Crystal Palace shortly before his 22nd birthday. There was a boyish enthusiasm to his game and an unpredictable edge that his first manager at Arsenal, George Graham, found impossible to coach. In the end he gave up, having realised that you couldn't incorporate this free spirit into any structured set-up. Letting him loose to run wild was the only way to handle him.

In terms of strike partnerships, perhaps Wright's best came towards the end of his Arsenal career when Dennis Bergkamp's genius found a way of linking up with him. For a time, the Dutchman and the Englishman formed an unstoppable duo.

That brief period under Arsène Wenger, however, proved the exception to the rule. In essence, Wright was an outright individual, a total one-off, whose appetite for football, whose swashbuckling character and, most importantly, never-ending supply of goals totally entranced a love-struck Highbury.

Thierry Henry might have surpassed that goalscoring record, but you will have to go an awfully long way to find another Ian Wright.

**Alan Smith**

# Others we have loved

## JEFF BLOCKLEY (1972-1975)

The idea was fine. To find an international-class defensive replacement for the Arsenal captain Frank McLintock, whose passionate powers were beginning to wane. That was manager Bertie Mee's mission – but he failed, and later called the purchase of Jeff Blockley his "greatest mistake" at Highbury.

McLintock, the Scot who had led the Club so passionately to the Double, was still highly regarded by the fans. They had a special attachment to one of the driving forces of the Club's new-found success, and any replacement would have to endure suspicion and potential rejection. But there were other problems, too; ones that were not immediately apparent when the 6ft 1in centre-half was called up to play for England against Yugoslavia, aged 23, within days of being signed from Coventry City in October 1972. That was the good news. The less-than-good news was that Blockley was a stopper of no great elegance or special wisdom. He never played for his country again. He had the side-burns of the era (a la Rodney Marsh and Stan Bowles), but not the footwork. He looked, in short, clumsy. After the quiet authority of Peter Simpson playing in the anchor role with McLintock, the sheer awkwardness of the new recruit, fumbling in his unfamiliar surroundings at Arsenal under the burden of a large transfer fee, quickly became clear.

While Simpson would ready himself for every battle on the pitch with a steady stream of nerve-calming cigarettes in the locker room, Blockley had no such habitual outlet. His nervousness was clear to see. The nadir was reached in the 1972 FA Cup semi-final against Sunderland when Arsenal were attempting to become finalists for the third straight year, having won one and lost one in the two preceding seasons. There was a sense of divine right about becoming an FA Cup finalist at Arsenal – a belief which was to prove badly mistaken when an exposed Blockley gave the ball away and Sunderland scored as a result of his dithering. He was never forgiven: his transfer to Leicester City, less than three

years after his arrival, was indicative of his short, doom-laden time.

**Sue Mott**

## **JIMMY BLOOMFIELD (1954-1960)**

In the mid-to-late 1950s when Arsenal were going nowhere in particular, Tommy Docherty, the dynamic Scottish wing-half signed from Preston North End, played alongside Jimmy Bloomfield. They were contrasting midfielders: Docherty, all muscular, perpetual motion, Bloomfield a ball-crafting artist. "Without a shadow of a doubt, Jimmy was international class, yet he never earned a full cap for England," Docherty says. "Today? His price would be £15 million, maybe £20 million. He was a great player: elegant, with two good feet – not a great goalscorer, but very thoughtful: a manager's delight."

Bloomfield was born in 1934 in Kensington, London, and his career began with an amateur club, Hayes, before he joined Brentford in 1952. He was signed by Tom Whittaker for £8,000 two years later when Brentford were relegated, and became a key player for Arsenal. He was commanding and imaginative, possessing touch, vision and a phenomenal work-rate before the term became fashionable. Without him, Arsenal might well have been relegated and their history altered. Between 1954 and 1960, he made 227 appearances and scored 56 goals; although he gained two under-23 caps he was never promoted to the national team, where Johnny Haynes of Fulham ruled the left midfield. Bloomfield died suddenly of a heart attack in 1983, at the age of 49, while he was coach at Luton Town.

**David Miller**

## **GUS CAESAR (1985-1991)**

It began so well. Like Peter Marinello, Caesar made his debut for Arsenal as a teenager, against Manchester United, and looked the part. He was a replacement for Viv Anderson, the suspended right back, and doggedly pursued Jesper Olsen,

United's tricky Danish winger, all afternoon and successfully harried him into ineffectiveness. George Graham, the Arsenal manager, ever concerned for the rigour of his defence, would have been a contented man.

There followed many bit-part defensive contributions: at full-back, centre-half and occasionally as a utility, man-marking midfielder. An impact had been made. He was called up to the England under-21 squad, but doubts seemed to remain about his best position and the concern seemed to affect the player himself. As his namesake proved in the days of the Roman Empire, it was necessary to take the populace with you; unfortunately, the Highbury populace were of the opinion that his nerves tended to overrule his judgment. His was accorded no great acclaim during his frequent appearances as a substitute and became nicknamed the "Five-Minute Man".

The 1988 League Cup Final against Luton Town proved to be Caesar's ultimate undoing. With a dominant Arsenal leading 2-1 and seven minutes remaining, Caesar miskicked a clearance in his own penalty area and Luton's Danny Wilson emerged to score the equaliser. The underdogs snatched a late winner and Caesar played only five more matches in two years, although he played for another 10 years at clubs including Queens Park Ranger, Bristol City, Airdrieonians and Colchester United.

**Sue Mott**

## **WILF COPPING (1934-1939)**

Probably the most teak-tough hard man Arsenal ever employed, the Barnsley-born, former miner caused fear and consternation in opponents wherever his stoic defending arts were deployed. He was famous for not shaving before matches to add to the Gothic image and with his array of uncompromising tackles he embodied the law: Thou Shalt Not Pass.

No greater sign of that determination was ever seen than during the so-called Battle of Highbury, a 'friendly' international between England and Italy at Highbury in 1934. Copping was picked in defence, and despite the galaxy of skill on offer from the World Champions, was the most crucial figure of the day. Built like a middleweight boxer, he set about systematically terrorising the dancing Italians; within two minutes Vittorio Monti, the visitors' centre-half, had broken his foot in a clash with Copping. The treatment room after the match,



which England won 3-2, resembled a battlefield hospital, strewn with bodies, blood and bandages.

Copping was infamous for a Vesuvian temper and insisted on total silence around him before he went on the pitch. Nevertheless, he was never sent off nor booked in 189 games for Arsenal – perhaps the referees were too scared to go near him. Copping won 20 caps for England and might have had a longer career at Highbury but for World War II, when he served with the Army in North Africa – unsurprisingly rising to be a Sergeant-Major. After the war he was a coach at clubs including Bristol City and Coventry City and died, aged 70, in 1980.

**Sue Mott**

## **PAUL DAVIS (1978-1995)**

Paul Davis never did anything in a hurry, whether gracefully controlling the ball before sweeping it out to the wings or merely sitting down at the table to enjoy his evening meal. The slowest eater in history, Davo would still be nibbling away at his main course long after dessert had been served. But he was a midfielder who reeked with class in terms of the way he could dictate play. Blessed with a left foot fashioned in heaven, this quietly spoken Londoner rarely got caught in possession, so sharply did he think and so smoothly did he move.

A less-heralded aspect of Davis was that he always stuck to his guns on points of principle. During a long and lonely exile, after a disagreement with George Graham saw him training with the kids, Paul didn't budge. He just kept his head down and got on with the job. Such dogged professionalism paid off when he returned to first-team action to play a central part in Arsenal's 1994 Cup Winners' Cup triumph. This served as a reminder of the sterling service provided over the previous 14 years: you don't remain at Arsenal for so long without harbouring something special.

**Alan Smith**

## **TOMMY DOCHERTY (1958-1961)**

He became famous as a manager for having "more clubs than Jack Nicklaus", but in his playing days this cultured, combative wing-half was more modest in his peregrinations. Born in the Gorbals, in Glasgow, he arrived at Highbury via Celtic and Preston North End, where he had supplemented his typically meagre wages by also running a restaurant. Ever the adventurer, Docherty moved to Arsenal in 1958 after falling out with the Lancashire club and inspired a following for his vibrant tackling and vociferous chat. But his playing was hampered – both by his age (he was already 30 when signed by the Club) and a broken ankle, sustained in his second season.

Ambitious to move into management, ‘the Doc’ went to Chelsea in 1961 as a player/coach, thereby kick-starting one of the most famous managerial careers in the history of British football. By the time he retired, in February 1988, he had been installed as the boss of 13 different clubs, plus Scotland. For almost 30 years he cracked jokes, annoyed chairmen, and constructed some of the best young sides of the time. From Chelsea to Rotherham United, Queens Park Rangers, Aston Villa, Porto, Hull City, Scotland, Manchester United, Derby County, QPR (again), Sydney Olympic, Preston, South Melbourne, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Altrincham, he plied an unmistakably gleeful and controversial trade. As Docherty once said: "Preston are one of my old clubs. Then again, most of them are."

**Sue Mott**

## **EDU (2001-2005)**

An abiding memory of Edu would appear to sum up the man: Arsenal had just claimed the Premiership title in the old enemy’s backyard and it was the sweetest of feelings to be swigging champagne on the White Hart Lane pitch. In the middle of it all, at the centre of a joyous ruck, Edu could be seen leading the dance with no little rhythm, the biggest of grins plastering his face. You had only to look at the expression on every other player’s face to see how big a part the Brazilian played in the dressing room.

Edu, it’s true, was as popular as they come, a generous character who handled himself with dignity throughout his time in London. It wasn’t always easy. After a fake Portuguese passport delayed his arrival, the midfielder found it difficult to secure a regular place with players such as Patrick Vieira, Ray

Parlour, Gilberto and, latterly, Francesc Fabregas around. From the very start, too, injury played a part. Coming on at half-time for his debut against Leicester City, he lasted only 15 minutes before hobbling off again. He would play only another four games during the rest of that season.

Yet Edu came back with typical resolve to play an important part in the next few campaigns. None more so than the season that culminated in the popping of corks at Spurs. Eduardo César Gaspar could afford to look pleased. He had been instrumental in guiding the Gunners to glory with an intuitive left foot and eye for the right pass.

Yet the following season he dropped out of the frame. With his contract nearly up and chances few and far between, his adventure in England was drawing to a close. Typically, he left on good terms with everyone's blessing.

**Alan Smith**

## **BOBBY GOULD (1968-1970)**

If God gave marks for trying, Bobby Gould would sit proudly in a class of his own; he was that kind of player. Never one to give up, the burly centre-forward would chase lost causes so doggedly that they occasionally turned into something more promising.

No one could ever doubt his burning desire to succeed, or indeed his overflowing enthusiasm for simply playing the game. The swarthy lad from Coventry just wanted to win and he would keep running all day, totally undeterred by the odds stacked against him. Witness the 1969 League Cup Final when Swindon Town had the cheek to beat their exalted opponents. The scorer of Arsenal's only goal that day, Gould was in tears at the final whistle, his commitment plain for all to see.

Actually, save for that defeat, it hadn't been a bad season on a personal level; it was his best for the Club as it turned out. Thirteen goals was a respectable return, with the prospect of more to come. Sadly, sheer endeavour and heart could take him only so far at a time when Arsenal, after a decade of mediocrity, were now gearing up to win something solid.

With bright talents such as Charlie George and Ray Kennedy emerging through the ranks, Gould's prosaic contributions were deemed surplus to requirements. Still, he could never say he didn't give it a go.

## **Alan Smith**

### **PERRY GROVES (1986-1992)**

The Bow-born winger-cum-striker provided a muchneeded vein of humour through the years of George Graham's time as manager. He had three outstanding traits: ginger hair, mustard keenness and a fiery propensity to hit enthusiastic shots – not necessarily into the goal. Yet for all of them he was deeply loved.

Formerly of Colchester United, Groves was Graham's first signing. The Tintin lookalike was fast and hard-working and supporters looked upon him compassionately, so visible was his effort. He also had a kinship with the Club: his uncle Vic, a former eel-skinner, had captained Arsenal in the early 1960s, and was just as ebullient as his nephew. The younger Groves possessed a style more frantic than finessed, but was highly effective on good days. It was his scampering dash and cross from the left that wrong-footed Liverpool's defence in the 1987 League Cup Final, setting up Charlie Nicholas to score. For those occasional gems, he was forgiven all of the mishits.

The North Bank sang *We All Live In A Perry Groves World* – to the tune of *Yellow Submarine*, by the Beatles – which, somewhat profligately, listed him at every position on the field, including goalkeeper. This was possibly overstating his virtues, but love is blind. He played 203 games for Arsenal, 83 of those as substitute, including the League title-clinching match at Anfield in 1989, before moving on to Southampton in 1992. After his retirement from football he became a travelling salesman for a company that specialised in school playgrounds.

## **Sue Mott**

### **JOHN JENSEN (1992-1996)**

'JJ' was famous at Highbury, not for his defensive abilities, nor his effectiveness in the tackle, nor even his luxuriant moustache. He was famous – indeed

achieved cult status – because of a goal drought of Saharan proportions. For 98 games Jensen toiled in front of the Arsenal back four, passing crisply, snapping gamely at the heels of approaching forwards, and failing to score a goal. It began as a novelty, continued as an embarrassment, and went on to become a freak of nature. How could a player, a substantially gifted Danish international who had scored a fine first-time goal from the edge of the penalty area in the 1992 European Championship Final, play so many continuous hours for Arsenal without scoring?

His anguish cannot have been hugely aided by the crowd enthusiastically shouting "shoooooooooot!" whenever he received the ball, even in his own penalty area. No goal came; it was not funny any more. Then one cold, wet New Year's Eve in 1994 against QPR, the ball found him within range of the goal and Fate at last relaxed her grip. Jensen scored. The fans sang his name long into the night, even though the match actually finished in a 1-3 defeat, and T-shirts were on sale at the next home game saying, "I Saw John Jensen Score".

The floodgates, it was assumed, would open. In fact, they were slammed shut again. He played 137 times for Arsenal and scored just that single, solitary goal. But, by heavens, it would be remembered.

**Sue Mott**

## **KANU (1999-2004)**

He was asking for the headline: 'Kanun Believe It?' But he was worth it, too. His unorthodox bamboozling of British football was exemplified many times, not least with a fabulous hat-trick against Chelsea soon after his canny signing by Arsène Wenger. Typically, the Arsenal manager spotted a creative genius lurking on the fringes of the Inter Milan team after a life-saving operation to mend a heart defect.

The gangling Nigerian international was soon installed as first-choice striker and made an instant impression on his debut. Not entirely in regulation fashion, mind. It was one of those Highbury moments that will live on in the memory: an FA Cup tie against Sheffield United with the score level at one goal apiece. Then the visiting goalkeeper sent the ball into touch, a common courtesy, so that an injured player could receive treatment. Kanu, having never been party to such a move before, received Ray Parlour's throw-in, and instead of passing it on to a

Sheffield man, he rampaged down the wing and sent over a pin-point cross for Marc Overmars to score. The accidental villainy was soon repaired by Wenger, who magnanimously offered to replay the game. They did, although the score emerged as an exact replica of the first game, 2-1 to the Arsenal.

At 6ft 5in, Nwankwo Kanu was an extraordinarily long-limbed talent, who was voted African Player of the Year in 1996 after Nigeria won the gold medal at the Atlanta Olympics. It was Kanu's own two late goals against Brazil in the semi-finals that pitched his delirious team into the title-winning match. He had timing, quirks and unimpeachable skill. Sometimes too much of all three, allowing his feet and imagination to run away with him – to the frustration of fans and fellow players impatiently awaiting the ball. Gradually, he was edged towards the substitute's bench by the emergence of Thierry Henry and eventually let go on a free transfer to West Bromwich Albion before joining Harry Redknapp's Portsmouth.

**Sue Mott**

## **ANDERS LIMPAR (1990-1994)**

We had never seen anything like it. Those two impish feet moved nineteen to the dozen. They were an absolute blur during his first session at London Colney and Anders Limpar certainly didn't take long to make an impression – 10 minutes were enough to see that the unknown Swede with Romanian blood was capable of becoming a sensation in England.

And so it proved, though his impact was felt a lot quicker than many people anticipated. Limpar settled down virtually straight away to introduce his mesmeric dribbling skills, his eye for a pass and thunderous shot to an unsuspecting public.

Arsenal fans, at least, loved every minute. Here was a player who could add some audacity and flair to an already accomplished side, a player who could lift bums off seats with a flash of brilliance. Thirteen goals from the left wing in his debut season was no mean feat. They played a crucial part in bringing home the title. It seemed that the only way was up over the next few years as Limpar looked destined for a long-term starring role.

When that prospect didn't come to pass, it took everyone by surprise. Slowly but surely he fell out of favour with George Graham. Having seen what Limpar

could produce, the boss wasn't very impressed when he fell short of those standards. The winger, in turn, lost all his confidence, to the point where he didn't want the ball in certain games.

Still capable of magic – like a stunning 45-yard lob against Liverpool – such exhilarating moments were becoming increasingly rare. The writing was on the wall. Nevertheless, the whole dressing room still felt sad when word eventually came through that Limpar was leaving. During his short time at Highbury, he had lit up the place. Those initial signs on the training ground hadn't misled.

## **Alan Smith**

### **JIMMY LOGIE (1939-1955)**

When Walley Barnes, Arsenal's right back and captain of Wales, in his autobiography selected an all-time British XI, judged wholly on team ethic rather than individual ability, his three inside-forwards were Peter Doherty, of Derby County and Northern Ireland, Trevor Ford, of Swansea City and Wales, and Jimmy Logie, a diminutive genius for Arsenal who inexplicably gained only a single cap for England. "He was a will-o-the-wisp, a ball-conjurer," Barnes recalled. "When we went on tour to Brazil in 1949, one of their clubs offered to buy our goalkeeper George [Swindin], Logie and me, which was all very flattering but out of the question. Jimmy was special, and I'd give my last breath to see that he was properly supported in our midfield."

Born in 1919, and standing a mere 5ft 4in as an adult, Logie was apprenticed as a bricklayer and playing for Lochore Welfare Juniors in Edinburgh prior to signing with Arsenal five weeks before the outbreak of war. Following demobilisation, he swiftly became the darling of the Highbury terraces, his lack of inches and physique in the face of an uncompromisingly physical English game giving him particular public appeal. Together with Joe Mercer and Ronnie Rooke, he guided Arsenal towards fresh triumphs. There were times when he was criticised for dribbling too much, a flaw on heavy grounds where he did not possess the strength to hit the 40-yard cross-field passes that so distinguished Alex James – now his coach. He had similar flair on the ball to James, but not quite the same vision, and colleagues occasionally complained that by the time he released the ball they were already closely marked.

When Arsenal won the title in 1947/1948, Logie scored eight times in 39

appearances. He appeared in two FA Cup Finals, defeating Liverpool in 1950 and losing to Newcastle United in 1952, and scored 10 goals as Arsenal recaptured the League title the following season. In his eight-year career at Highbury he scored 76 goals in 328 appearances.

A heavy gambler, Logie's later years found him in humble employment with a newsagent in London's Piccadilly Circus; in sorry circumstances he died, aged 64, in 1984.

**David Miller**

## **GEORGE MALE (1929-1948)**

In the opinion of Bernard Joy, an amateur with Casuals FC who became part of the celebrated Arsenal machine in the late 1930s, the full-back partnership of George Male and Eddie Hapgood was exemplary. "Their brilliance as a pair outweighed any individual accomplishments," Joy wrote. "Part of the secret of their understanding was their contrast: Hapgood volatile, poised; Male determined, rugged, quick in recovery. While Hapgood possessed supreme self-confidence, indeed could appear conceited if you did not know him, Male was quiet and self-effacing."

Male's career began with Shakespeare Institute in the Forest Gate League in east London, then joining amateurs Clapton as a wing-half, where he played alongside Denis Hill-Wood, the future Arsenal chairman, and was soon 'stolen' by Herbert Chapman, signing for Arsenal in 1930 on his 20th birthday. In 1932, when still virtually unknown to the public, Male was drafted into the FA Cup Final team at the last minute to play as left-half when Alex James was declared unfit to face Newcastle United.

Within 18 months, Male would be appearing in the infamous, international match at Highbury against Italy when, together with Ted Drake, he was one of two late replacements for England. He made 19 international appearances in all, at a time when there were far fewer matches. He was to play in four championship winning teams, in 1932/1933, 1933/1934 and 1934/1935 and 1937/1938, and the winning 1936 FA Cup Final team. In the triple-championship run, he made 116 appearances, the most of any player.

**David Miller**



## **PETER MARINELLO (1969-1973)**

An experiment that didn't work, Marinello was the casualty of ambition – not his own, but that of Bertie Mee. It was the Arsenal manager's plan to find a tricky, jinking, fabulous, flair-filled winger to lighten Arsenal's perceived dourness, and it was too great a load to bear for the slim, shy young man from Hibernian.

Dubbing him the 'Scottish George Best', as the newspapers did, was hardly likely to quell the fevered anticipation of the fans. His promotion on billboards all over the country, advertising the wonders of milk, was also counterproductive. He was persuaded to make a pop record, introduced to the seductive lights of London and, on his debut, scored a wonder goal against Manchester United at Old Trafford – holding the ball at his feet for all of 50 yards then rounding the mesmerised Alex Stepney in goal. A teenage wizard had been born ... we thought.

However, that match was his finest hour; he never was able to produce such form again. He could not force his way into the 1971 Double-winning first team. Marinello was one of the first celebrity footballers, but had no taste whatsoever for the limelight. He was eventually sold to Portsmouth, having played only 51 games and scored five goals. He left a trail no more substantial than a ghost, but those that watched him every other week in the reserves could vouch for his silky touch and graceful runs. It was with an air of resignation that Arsenal fans had to accept that Marinello could play in the provinces, but ultimately froze on the London stage.

**Sue Mott**

## **PAUL MERSON (1982-1997)**

Paul Merson had his admirers from the word go. Talented ball-players like Charlie Nicholas and Graham Rix recognised something special in the precocious teenager emerging from the ranks. During frenetic five-a-sides in the Clock End gym, the youngster held his own with no problem at all, matching the silky skills of those first-team heavyweights. It didn't take a genius to see what

was coming next: this likeable kid from west London would soon be stepping out on the big stage.

And step out he did, to great acclaim once he was settled in the side as a roving, inventive, inspirational force capable of turning a game with one cheeky chip. As a selfless strike partner he was difficult to beat, forever on the lookout for the right pass.

Off the pitch, too, you just had to love 'Merse'. He kept team-mates entertained with a sharp, vocal wit punctuated constantly with his favourite swear words. Reporting back for pre-season training, he would proudly tap a belly that had enjoyed its time off. "It'll take a few sit-ups to \*\*\*\*\* shift that!" he would joke, the infectious grin ever present.

Somehow he managed to come through the nightmare of alcohol and drug addiction to produce more swashbuckling stuff. When he walked back through the door after undergoing rehabilitation, everyone present could tell it was a good day for football. Charlie and 'Rixy' were right. Merse was a natural, and one of the best.

## **Alan Smith**

## **STEVE MORROW (1991-1997)**

Utilitarian, reliable, unfussy: Morrow seemed to symbolise George Graham's later years when flair and flamboyance were largely abandoned in favour of an iron grip. Unfortunately, his most famous move in the red shirt – a short, sharp drop which broke his shoulder – had been because of the failed grip of his captain, Tony Adams. It came in the aftermath of the 1993 League Cup victory against Sheffield Wednesday – the first part of a Cup Double that year – as the team cavorted in celebration on the Wembley pitch. Morrow, the winning goalscorer, was hoisted into his captain's arms, but, without warning, Adams accidentally dropped the Ulsterman to the ground, breaking a bone in his arm. Many players feel like fainting with joy at Wembley, Morrow acted out the role, literally, and missed the rest of the season.

Morrow had arrived at the Club in 1984 as a schoolboy, but struggled to find a place in the team and had already gained several caps for Northern Ireland before he made his Highbury debut. He was not quite Wenger's style of player, though, and was allowed to leave the Club in 1997.

**Sue Mott**

## **CHARLIE NICHOLAS (1983-1988)**

Mad. Absolutely barking. It was difficult to draw any other conclusion on first coming across this extrovert son of Glasgow. One night on a pre-season trip to Scotland, Nicholas lay upside down on his bed belting out U2 hits at the top of his voice, banging his feet on the wall just to make sure no one dropped off.

Yet this Bono look-a-like could also play a bit. None of his weary teammates needed reminding of that. He possessed some wonderful skills – on a good day, he could waltz around opponents at the drop of a hat to send the North Bank into raptures.

Unfortunately, too many difficult days blighted his spell in north London. Try as he might, this gifted striker failed to show Arsenal fans how he came to score 50 goals in one season at Celtic. Perhaps it didn't help that Arsenal's playing style at the time suited more athletic sorts. He preferred the ball into his feet, but was often asked to work the channels.

Much has been made of the 'Champagne Charlie' tag and undoubtedly the player did lap up the capital's attractions with some enthusiasm. On the other hand, he also worked extremely hard in training to try to reverse a discouraging trend. That application paid off in 1987 when two goals at Wembley secured George Graham's first trophy, the League Cup. Little did he know it, but Nicholas's fortunes from that point on would take a turn for the worse. The following season, he would pull on the shirt only another three times before being cast aside and eventually joining Aberdeen.

Maybe it simply was a case of wrong place, wrong time. Maybe Nicholas should have accepted the advances of Liverpool or Manchester United in the first place. Whatever the truth, this charismatic character left as an enigma. Still mad, mind. Just a little deflated.

**Alan Smith**

## **MARC OVERMARS (1997-2000)**

Most clubs were suspicious of the flying Dutchman – reluctant to touch him following a serious knee injury that cast a dark cloud over his future. Wenger, however, was of a different mind. He saw the rich possibilities in investing some cash, faith and time in the little winger from Ajax. As with many of his signings, Wenger's hunch paid off: in his first season in England, Marc Overmars played a key and thrilling part in the 1997/1998 Double-winning campaign as an outlet on the left of a formidable midfield.

While things didn't click straight away – many fans vocally doubted his appetite for the physical side – Overmars got to grips with the task shortly after Christmas with two beautifully taken goals at home to Leeds United. That was the turning point. With the crowd right behind him, he didn't look back.

Some crippling bursts of acceleration would end either with a cut back or a measured crack at goal. Unplayable at times, his scintillating pace was his main weapon, although a cool head in the box also helped. At Old Trafford, it was Overmars who slipped the ball past Peter Schmeichel to tip the title race Arsenal's way and it was Overmars who set the tone at Wembley with an opening goal against Newcastle that helped to clinch the Double.

How do you top that? In reality, Overmars couldn't. After a couple more seasons, he departed for Barcelona in a deal that made him the most expensive Dutch player ever. As for the best, that would be pushing it, but he must definitely rank as one of the most explosive. Plenty of full-backs in England can testify to that.

## **Alan Smith**

## **EMMANUEL PETIT (1997-2000)**

When Arsenal won the domestic Double in 1997/1998, Emmanuel Petit's first season at Highbury, Wenger would state in the euphoric aftermath that, "we had the best players between the ages of 28 and 38; Manchester United and Liverpool the best between 20 and 28".

Born in Dieppe in September 1970, Petit was nudging 28, and his arrival, in conjunction with Patrick Vieira, his younger compatriot, had provided the link between Arsenal's old-guard defence and the attacking brio of Dennis Bergkamp and Ian Wright or Nicolas Anelka. It was a team of formidable balance.

Petit had begun his career with Argues, a minor French club, before signing

for Monaco (then coached by Wenger) at the age of 18. He won both the French League and Cup there.

It was a tell-tale sign of a shifting era at Highbury when the blond, pony-tailed, designer-dressed Petit was introduced to the press by Wenger and David Dein, then vice-chairman, accompanied by Wenger's confident assertion that "Manu can play in any position on the left side". Petit was equally enthusiastic, saying: "The football in England is the best in Europe – better than in Italy, France or Spain, because it's spectacular."

Petit began to play deeper, to tackle harder, allowing Vieira more scope to roam forwards. His forceful play cost him dear – he was sent off three times – but the running power of Petit and Vieira brought Arsenal the title.

**David Miller**

## **VLADIMIR PETROVIC (1982-1983)**

Perhaps a social experiment that was a few years ahead of its time, the purchase of Yugoslavian international Vladimir Petrovic by Terry Neill in 1982 did not quite galvanise the Arsenal midfield in the manner of Vieira a few years later. Then the young Frenchman's arrival heralded a cultural revolution, which brought fame – and foreigners – to Highbury under Wenger. But in the early 1980s, Petrovic's arrival was pretty soon followed by his departure. In 22 games, he scored three goals and the Arsenal manager was forced to admit he had made a mistake.

One of the "stars of the Star," Red Star Belgrade, Petrovic was known as a cerebral football wizard, a superb technician and a master of free kicks, who was adventurous enough to leave Eastern Europe after 526 games for his club side. But the move was unsuccessful. Perhaps the cause of the failure was culture shock: Petrovic joined a midfield of rigorously English stock and found it difficult to adjust to the pace and robustness of football in England.

The Serbian swiftly left to continue his playing career in Belgium. Eventually he became a respected coach, working first with his old club, Red Star, then inspiring the Serbia and Montenegro team to the final of the 2004 European Under-21 Championships. His short-lived adventure at Highbury clearly left his ardour for cross-cultural experiments undimmed: in 2005, he could be found coaching in China.

**Sue Mott**

## **ROBERT PIRES (2000-2006)**

One of Wenger's 'French musketeers', the left-sided attacker was lauded at Highbury for his poetic motion, sumptuous skill, and almost telepathic understanding with his fellow-countryman, Thierry Henry. Pires was the arch-continental who adapted to the tough Premiership conditions against the best guesses of his critics. It was widely assumed that his feathery touch would be incapacitated by such a physical, foreign game, but within a year of his arrival the jinks and dinks and lobs had converted the sceptical and convinced Highbury of his talent.

The Arsenal fans voted him their Player of the Year in 2002, in honour of his contribution to exquisitely manufactured goals. He was also one of the Arsenal 'Invincibles', who made history when they remained unbeaten during the entire 2003/2004 season.

If that seemed to be the highlight of his career, he had one final flourish in his last season at Highbury: he tackled someone. Not, in fact, just someone, but Patrick Vieira, who was revisiting Highbury in his capacity as a Juventus midfielder during the course of the European Champions League quarter-final. The tackle, a shuddering affair rather than a dainty nick, led almost immediately to Arsenal's opening goal. It was a moment to savour: 'Chopper' Pires was born, only to be moved at the end of the season to the Spanish club, Villarreal on account of Wenger's strict policy of not offering more than one-year deals to players aged over 30.

**Sue Mott**

## **NIALL QUINN (1983-1990)**

The fact that Niall Quinn didn't establish himself at Arsenal can be traced back to several factors. For a start, he was young and raw at the time, his lanky 6ft 4in frame yet to gain its full strength. In addition, the centre-forward's confidence

sometimes deserted him in front of an impatient crowd, as did his touch when he grew nervous.

However, you could understand that. He was, after all, still learning the ropes. Then something happened to stymie his progress any further – the signing of one Alan Smith. As a similar sort of player bought for quite a lot of money, my presence clearly wasn't going to help the young Dubliner's chances of forcing his way into the team on a regular basis. Suddenly, first-team appearances became few and far between for Quinn.

Being the genial type, though, Quinn didn't tend to complain. He would rather keep smiling and try to improve. On the social side, what's more, he was always committed, with a habit of scouring the Holloway Road for the best pint of Guinness. Come Monday morning, there were always a few tales to tell, and they were often recounted with a hoarse voice after too much singing

However, in the end, Quinn did have enough. With his career going nowhere as a perennial deputy, he grew disenchanted. He was desperate to leave, and have a chance to make his way in the game before the moment passed.

Everyone back at Highbury was absolutely delighted when Quinn made a success of his time at Manchester City and subsequently enjoyed a heroic Indian summer at Sunderland. As one of the good guys, he deserved nothing less.

## **Alan Smith**

## **JOHN RADFORD (1964-1976)**

To this day John Radford remains the youngest Arsenal player to have scored a hat-trick – against Wolves in 1965 – when he was aged 17 years and 315 days. Born in Hemsworth, Yorkshire, in 1947, he signed as an apprentice at Highbury in 1962, as a professional two years later, and made his debut in March 1964 against West Ham United. A characteristically dour, gritty Yorkshireman, he was one of the rocks upon which the Double of 1971 was built.

Frank McLintock, his skipper, says: "Though self-effacing, he had a fabulous talent. He was a superb athlete, led the line with guile, took all sorts of knocks and was very unselfish. He was a powerhouse in the air, and had the courage to compete magnificently with his back to goal. He was uncompromising in his northern temperament, even though he had been in London since he was a boy of 15.

"I wouldn't have swapped 'Raddy' and Ray Kennedy for any other striking partnership in the division. To play behind the pair of them was a joy. If you were under pressure in defence, you could hit any ball up to them, high or low, and they would shield it. Raddy was a big, miserable-looking sod, but he wasn't that way really. Nothing ever put him off."

As Bertie Mee, together with Don Howe, fashioned an increasingly meaningful – and often mean – team in the late 1960s, Radford's contribution was a model of consistency: 19 goals in 1968/1969, and 19 again the following season when Arsenal won the European Fairs Cup. As for the Double-winning season which followed, Radford scored 21 goals in all competitions. In a total of 481 appearances for the Club he scored 149 goals, making him, to date, fourth in the list of all-time scorers at the Club.

## **David Miller**

### **GRAHAM RIX (1975-1988)**

Malcolm Macdonald, a left-sided player like Graham Rix, was part of the Arsenal team in the late 1970s, under manager Terry Neill, which promised to be special, but never quite fulfilled expectation. Macdonald was an admirer of the young Rix. "Graham was hugely skilled, but to me it was clear he wasn't a genuine winger, the way we tried to use him," he says. "He would have been better in an old-fashioned inside-forward role, not playing wide."

The problem for Neill was that he already had a supreme left-side central midfield player in the shape of Liam Brady. He admits: "There was a school of thought at the time that Graham might not be best on the wing, but I remember the perfection of his cross to Alan Sunderland for the winning goal against Manchester United in the 1979 FA Cup Final. The reason for using him wide was that he had the skill in crossing that tempts the goalkeeper to come for it, then realising too late that the ball has swerve or fade on it, and that he can't get there."

Born in Doncaster, Rix represented Yorkshire Schoolboys before making four League appearances for Arsenal in the 1976/1977 season (the same season he played for the England under-21s against Finland). Rix established himself in the Arsenal side the next season, and during the following nine years was one of the most consistent creators in the League. In only four of those seasons did he



make fewer than 38 League appearances, while his best goal tally was nine in 1981/1982, when Arsenal finished fifth.

Rix was also vying for permanent inclusion in the England team, but manager Ron Greenwood saw him primarily as the understudy to Trevor Brooking, confining his international career to 17 caps

Though not a genuine winger, Rix had tactical vision, and for nine years gave Arsenal a vital balance between defence and attack.

## **David Miller**

### **HERBIE ROBERTS (1926-1937)**

The red-haired Herbie Roberts proved to be the answer to a central tactical problem that faced Herbert Chapman as his Highbury revolution developed in the late 1920s. Chapman was transforming the defence following the change in the offside law and Roberts was physically and temperamentally suited to fulfil Chapman's strict instructions: block the middle. Roberts – signed for a mere £200 from Oswestry Town in 1926 – was phlegmatic, and unruffled in the face of pressure or barracking from the crowd.

A gunsmith's apprentice, Roberts was not only an intelligent footballer, but one willing to follow orders. It might be that he was not a strong kicker, but Chapman did not mind this, simply requiring Roberts to head clear anything in the air or to play a short ball on the ground to either of the full-backs or wing-halves. It was Roberts who would become the template for post-1925 tactics. A knee injury kept him out of the 1930 FA Cup-winning team, but over the course of the three championship-winning seasons he made 102 appearances.

"He was one of the most gentlemanly professionals I ever met," Eddie Hapgood said. "Herbie and I were contemporaries in the closest sense: I gained my place in the first team shortly before him. He was a slim, rangy lad, bred and born a wing-half, but destined to become the most talked of centre-half that big-time football had known." Despite Arsenal's fame and success, Roberts claimed only one international cap, against Switzerland, in 1931.

The knee problems that had cost him an FA Cup winner's medal forced his retirement in 1937, and he became the trainer of the Club's Southern League team. During World War II, while serving as a Lieutenant in the Royal Fusiliers, he died of erysipelas, a bacterial infection, aged 39, in 1944.

**David Miller**

## **RONNIE ROOKE (1946-1949)**

There are not many sportsmen who are catapulted to fame in such a demanding physical team game as football at the age of 35. The improbable rise of Ronnie Rooke in 1946 was the stuff of story books.

Tom Whittaker, Arsenal's trainer/physiotherapist under manager George Allison, had seen plenty of Rooke's craft with Fulham, and when the Second Division striker played as a guest for an Arsenal XI against Moscow Dynamo at White Hart Lane. Arsenal's immediate post-war form was so troubling that relegation was a possibility, but, late in 1946, Whittaker heard from Jack Peart, Fulham's manager, that a despondent Rooke was available. Taking a gamble, Arsenal jumped at the chance to sign him. Rooke, who had been contemplating the end of his first-class career, arrived at Highbury for the game with Charlton Athletic on December 14. He proceeded to score the only goal, then went on to score a further 20 before the end of the season, including a hat-trick in a 6-2 win over Manchester United and all four goals in the victory over Middlesbrough. It was an astonishing turnaround for the player and the Club.

Whittaker recalled: "The effortless thump as Ronnie cracked the ball home from any distance speedily made him as big a box-office draw on First Division grounds as he had been in the Second Division." Of the 45 goals scored after Rooke's arrival, 21 came from his boots. From sitting bottom-but-one in the table, the team rose to a respectable 13th.

In 1947/1948, with Whittaker now manager, Arsenal motored to the Club's sixth League title, with Rooke tallying an exceptional 33 goals and playing in all 42 League matches.

With his bandy legs, his Charlton Heston features and cannon-like shooting, Rooke was briefly the talk of the game. After serving as player-manager of Bedford Town for a decade, he retired from football and became a porter at Luton Airport.

**David Miller**

## **JON SAMMELS (1963-1971)**

A quiet and sensitive soul brought up in Suffolk, Sammels had two distinct careers at Highbury. One as a talented, elegant midfield playmaker brought through from the youth team whose qualities were explosively demonstrated by his 30-yard rocket against Alex Stepney in the 1969 home win over Manchester United. The other as a player in the grip of a confidence crisis, returning from injury only to find that a combination of George Graham and Peter Storey had made his contribution redundant.

Sammels was not a player who brandished an ego. Dedicated and self-effacing, he was seen as a potential star. He passed with accuracy, possessed two capable feet and his firepower from midfield was exemplified by his tally of 53 goals in 270 games. His handsome contribution to Highbury reached its peak in 1970 when he scored one of the goals that beat Anderlecht in the Fairs Cup Final, which ended the 17 barren years without silverware. But from then on his star declined as Graham, with typical strolling arrogance, made more of a creative midfield role and Storey filled the destructive role with gusto.

Sammels registered his loss of wide popularity and his game became marked by hesitancy and hurt. As Arsenal were celebrating their League and Cup Double in 1971, Sammels was signing for Leicester City, where he remained for the rest of his career.

**Sue Mott**

## **PETER SIMPSON (1960-1978)**

The British Empire was built largely on the back of loyal, dependable, uncomplaining steadfast foot soldiers. Peter Simpson epitomised such a foot soldier. Simpson, one of the corner-stones of an eventually great team, never gained the England caps that he so richly deserved – largely because of the rival claims of outstanding central defenders during his career, such as Bobby Moore, Maurice Norman, Jack Charlton, Norman Hunter, Colin Todd, Brian Labone and Roy McFarland.

Bob Wilson, Arsenal's goalkeeper, retains a regard for Simpson that goes beyond the mere allegiance of a football colleague: "He had these weird telescopic legs that seemed to be able to reach anything. Yet he was so humble,

and never realised how good he was. One of my lasting memories is of the way, whenever we came to leave the dressing room, there was always one guy missing – Peter would be in the toilet having a last-minute fag."

Frank McLintock's affection for this iron-man defender rivals that of Wilson. "Stan, as he was known for one of those inexplicable reasons, was the perfect partner. His unruffled approach helped to temper my impetuosity. He was so underrated: the last person to recognise his own efficiency. He was the quietest colleague you ever met, so unassuming about himself, yet we all thought he was fantastic, even if he never gave any sign of outward confidence."

Simpson first appeared, during Billy Wright's management, in 1963/1964, as a wing-half. He made six consecutive appearances, then another six the following season after McLintock's arrival, when he was in competition with David Court and Terry Neill. It was in 1969/1970 that the partnership with McLintock, under the guidance of coach Don Howe, finally gelled. By now, there was no defence against which centreforwards in the Football League were less eager to play. After 477 appearances, Simpson left the Club and moved to play for the New England Teamen in America.

## **David Miller**

## **FRANK STAPLETON (1972-1981)**

In David O'Leary's study at home, a black-and-white photograph captures three shy Irish boys with long shaggy hair wearing wide-lapelled jackets. Fashion victims of the 1970s, they had all come across from Dublin to try their luck at Arsenal. Alongside O'Leary stood Liam Brady and Frank Stapleton. Incredibly, all three would go on to carve a niche in Arsenal history, although Stapleton was later to leave on bad terms: the Highbury faithful were absolutely livid when he left for Manchester United – and at a cut price, too.

Perhaps they sensed then that this conscientious competitor would be difficult to replace. The Republic of Ireland star left a huge gap; no longer could the team rely on his ceaseless endeavour, on his ability to hold up the ball or subtly flick it off to a supporting accomplice. Neither could they count on a heading ability that was second to none. Not the tallest, nor indeed the most powerful, Stapleton had immaculate timing, which caused all manner of problems in the air as well as reaping plenty of goals.

One of his most famous efforts came in the 1979 FA Cup Final when a precise header gave his future employers a mountain to climb. Two years later he would be heading up the road to Old Trafford, where another successful spell served only to emphasise what they were missing at Highbury.

He couldn't match O'Leary's longevity or attain Brady's stature as a legend, but Stapleton, without doubt, deserves his place in the sun.

## **Alan Smith**

### **ALAN SUNDERLAND (1977-1984)**

Anyone old enough to remember can surely never forget. What an image it was: the frizzy-haired frontrunner wheeling away, a mixture of astonishment and ecstasy creasing his face. Alan Sunderland had just slotted home one of the most famous goals in FA Cup Final history, breaking Manchester United hearts to secure instant safe passage into Highbury folklore.

If he didn't do anything else in his entire career, this quick-witted Yorkshireman could console himself with the fact that the red half of North London would never overlook his role at Wembley that afternoon. Yet there was, of course, more to it than that. Quite a lot more; this busy forager quickly became an important part of Terry Neill's side after his signing from Wolverhampton Wanderers. Sunderland began playing in a deep role on the right, where his speed, strength and dribbling skills found a niche, but when Malcolm Macdonald became injured he moved forward to partner Frank Stapleton in attack and the pair went on to form an effective strike force.

Sunderland was good in the air – brave, too – which garnered quite a few goals. Although never prolific, he enjoyed a five-year spell when he rarely missed a game. Finally nudged out by the arrival of Tony Woodcock and Charlie Nicholas, Sunderland left for Ipswich sure of one thing: he had left a deep mark on N5.

## **Alan Smith**

## **IAN URE (1963-1969)**

John Francome 'Ian' Ure was the star of Arsenal's team in the 1960s, that all-conquering team which won the BBC football quiz show, *Quizball*. An intense and intelligent Scot, his memory was encyclopaedic and his answers carried his team-mates to the title. For that feat alone, he was beloved by Arsenal fans still searching for success of any complexion after Tottenham Hotspur's 1960/1961 Double.

On the pitch, as Arsenal's centre-half, his form was a little more patchy. Impressive in the air, his impetuosity on the ground gave rise to some concerns and he was partially blamed for Arsenal's seismic defeat to lower-league Swindon Town in the 1969 League Cup Final. The blond defender who had helped Dundee to the semi-finals of the European Cup arrived in the summer of 1963, for a world-record fee, but Arsenal's notoriously leaky defence was never going to be entirely revamped by the signing of one man. Keen and uncompromising, Ure was sent off four times in an Arsenal career comprising 202 games (and two goals).

Ure was transferred to Manchester United in the summer of 1969, but soon left football entirely, to become a social worker in Kilmarnock.

**Sue Mott**

## **PAUL VAESSEN (1978-1982)**

One moment, one goal, one indelible memory seals Paul Vaessen's place in Arsenal's history. A promising young striker, he came on as substitute in the highly charged European Cup Winners' Cup semi-final against Juventus in Turin, in 1980. The Italian job had looked all but lost. Juve had not sampled defeat in a European tie at home for a decade, but Arsenal's momentous, Cup-fighting reputation inspired them to mount one last attack and the 18-year-old Vaessen headed home.

He did not play in the final a month later against Valencia, when Arsenal lost on penalties, and his name made only occasional guest appearances on the teamsheet thereafter as he became plagued by knee injuries. After being warned that to play on might leave him permanently disabled, he was forced to retire from the sport at the age of 21. He had played 49 games and scored 9 goals,

including that 'magic moment' at the Stadio Delle Alpi.

Vaessen's adjustment to civilian life proved desperately difficult: he became a heroin addict and was still battling his addiction at the time of his death, at the age of just 39.

**Sue Mott**

## **WILLIE YOUNG (1977-1981)**

The former Aberdeen club captain was signed twice by Terry Neill. Firstly for Tottenham Hotspur, then for Arsenal in the spring of 1977, when the team were desperate for a little Celtic brio alongside the more cultured skills of David O'Leary. But Young's debut was a disaster. "He tried to play like Pelé, Best and Gerson rolled into one," Neill says. "He should have remembered he was a 14-stone Scotsman." Ipswich Town won the game 4-1 and at least two of their goals could be marked down to him.

When Arsenal played Spurs a month later, he broke a record: "I think I became the first player in a London derby to be booed by both sets of fans when I ran on." Ninety minutes later he was approaching cult status after a performance of warrior-like proportions, wrapped in a head bandage. "We've Got The Biggest Willie In The Land," the North Bank sang in praise of their 6ft 3in, ogre-like defender.

Young moved to Nottingham Forest in 1981 before retiring from football to run a pub on the outskirts of Nottingham.

**Sue Mott**

**8.**



# **Mee at the Double**

Seventeen years without a major trophy was a long time for Arsenal. Bertie Mee put an end to the drought in emphatic style, bringing European glory and the Double to Highbury

# Enter Mee the disciplinarian

On the morning after England had won the World Cup in 1966, Bertie Mee, recently appointed manager of Arsenal in succession to Billy Wright, was among a crowd of well-wishers gathered in the lounge at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington, awaiting sight of the heroes after a night of celebration. "So what did you think of that?" Bertie was asked by a sports writer. He paused, thinking carefully, as he did in the event of any question from the press. "Not a bad match for spectators," he replied. Evidently things would be ordered differently under the new Highbury regime. Here was a disciplinarian from a military background who liked things to be exact. He is remembered for stating at one stage during his remarkable career in charge of Arsenal that he would not consider buying George Best, should the temperamental star become available from Old Trafford. "I don't think he would conform to the standards of Arsenal," said Mee. Within that opinion lay a guide to his mindset.

A player of minor accomplishment with Derby County reserves before World War II, retiring through injury after moving to Mansfield Town, Mee had spent six years of wartime service with the Royal Army Medical Corps as a rehabilitation officer, rising to the rank of sergeant. Initially assigned to the Army's school of physiotherapy in Hampshire, and qualified by 1942 with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, he was attached to the Eighth Army, serving in the Middle East, and soon revealed that hard-headed streak that Arsenal players would one day learn to view with awe. There, coincidentally, he had his first experience of organising footballers, arranging matches throughout the region, which included such familiar professional names as Tom Finney and Wilf Mannion. Simultaneously, he gained a reputation for being scrupulously correct, never a drinker, a gentleman on and off duty. When discharged in 1946, his commanding officer's assessment stated: "He has run his department efficiently throughout ... in organisation of sport, he is confident and self-reliant in his dealings with men. He is very trustworthy, highly commended, both for organisation and competence as masseur."

Returning to civvies, Mee soon slotted into his natural element. The Ministry of Health opened a rehabilitation centre in London and the experienced Mee was

an obvious choice to be in charge. Now he had his first serious management test, organising a team of 30, treating the entire range of disability from broken legs to multiple sclerosis. One of his staff was Fred Street, a former RAF physical training instructor, who would spend the next 20 years working with Mee. Street also became a qualified physio, subsequently joining Mee as his understudy at Highbury. Though loyal, Street nonetheless had an objective view of his boss's qualities. "He was a strict disciplinarian to a point of making it like the Services ... he would inspect your hands to make sure they were scrubbed, check that your shoes were clean, that you had a crease in your trousers ... he was ahead of his time in the organisation of the centre ... he created a tremendous atmosphere, with 12 of us working together in the gym." While with the clinic in North London, Mee was working with the FA, running courses during the summer at the training school at Lilleshall in Shropshire and establishing the Football and Injuries Training Badge. His innovations won increasing respect within the game among managers and players, and it was no surprise when Dr Alan Bass, the club doctor at Highbury who had worked with Mee at the London clinic, persuaded Arsenal in 1960 that they should appoint him as their full-time physiotherapist.

A new concept of fitness was about to hit Highbury. Interviewed in retirement by David Lemmon for his reminiscence *Arsenal in the Blood*, Mee reflected: "It didn't make much difference to me who was manager, I just got on with my job. I think they found me helpful in as much that, unlike the prima donnas of today whom I hear say, 'I'll declare myself fit on Saturday', there was no question of that with me. I said: 'I will tell you when you are fit' ... and the fact is that you work harder when you are injured than when you are fit, which is not commonplace in football. There was no question of coming in for treatment in the morning and then off in the afternoon. They came back in the afternoon and, if I thought it was appropriate, they came back in the evening." Jon Sammels, a key midfield player and defender of the 1960s, would recall: "It meant you didn't look forward to being injured. I think Bertie knew that, and he didn't want malingerers. His Army background was evident ... it was strictly business in the treatment room." Terry Neill, who was signed by Billy Wright and was Club captain at one time during Mee's reign, recalled: "Bertie insisted on players working rigorously to get fit, and one of his prescribed exercises was to run up and down the terraces with him clinging on to your back like a jockey. There were times when I felt like dropping him! Bertie could sometimes be too officious. He always gave the impression that he was striving to be in total control of his emotions, and in football that's not always possible." George Armstrong, linchpin of Mee's most successful side, added: "He was serious and

conscientious. We never had a full treatment room. He didn't tolerate injuries, and if you were injured, you had to work hard."

Mee's appointment had certainly been a surprise in the dressing room. Another big name had been expected in succession to Wright. Bob Wilson, who was signed by Wright as an amateur at Loughborough College and was to become one of the most brave and reliable goalkeepers in Britain, recalls: "We received a letter saying the manager would initially be Bertie Mee, and there was a quiet guffaw, thinking he was just a stopgap. We knew from the treatment room exactly what we would get, but in fact Bertie [provided] precisely what was needed – discipline. He could be serious to a fault, but was an amazing organiser. I think he recognised his chance and seized the moment. He never allowed anybody to stray out of line, and you knew it. He would even fine you for going out in the sun if we were in Cyprus or Bermuda or somewhere on tour. He would fine you if you didn't wear shinpads and you got an injury. He gave the dressing room a new ethic: 'Remember who you are, who you represent, a great Club'. We had suits from Austin Reed, plain with a single gold gun emblem, a certain style. You knew you couldn't openly do things that gave offence to the Club."

Thirty years on, in conversation with Lemmon, Mee was characteristically precise about the circumstances of his takeover. "Changes generally were needed at Arsenal ... mediocrity was being perpetuated. That was painfully obvious, and I thought I could change it. The standard needing raising 30 to 40 per cent ... For example, we were running four teams at the time: first team, Combination, Metropolitan and South-East Counties and it had amazed me to hear, in end-of-season discussions with earlier managers, that we were retaining players for the third team who would never make the grade. So the first thing I did was to cut out the Metropolitan League side. We wanted players who were good enough for Arsenal. I began by approaching the job from a purely management point of view ... the Club had to be more professional from all angles. The players were a good crowd but I felt they could be more dedicated ... when you're starting from scratch as I was, the first team is not necessarily the most important. You must have background organisation capable of supporting a successful team. It is better to have a lop-sided Club for the first few years with the balance weighing heavily on the backroom organisation."

The players found a minor gale blowing through the dressing room. If they wouldn't accept fines for irregularities, on or off the field – the recipient had to agree – the new manager removed their allocation of free tickets for major matches at Wembley. Despite a vogue for long hair in the Sixties, anyone without a haircut jeopardised selection, though Charlie George would push that

tenet to the limit. "I had no illusions about the type of player that I wanted when I took over," said Mee. "I wanted 11 George Armstrongs or 11 Frank McLintocks. You rely on your senior pros, so that if someone kicks over the traces they will be taken to one side by a couple of seniors, so that after a time discipline comes from within."

A common weakness for a manager lacking significant playing credentials is that a dissident, challenging player will confront him by saying: "Show us your medals." Confident in his own man-management ability, Mee's first move to protect his back on the technical side was the appointment of Dave Sexton, from Fulham, as coach. They already knew each other from working at Lilleshall. "Because I liked Bertie and because he was an intelligent man, I felt I couldn't go wrong," Sexton says. "He gave me a free hand, but we very much worked together, even if he wasn't out on the field. We discussed what he wanted. I was very aware of everything that the Hungarians had shown us in recent years, so we were working hard on supporting the man with the ball, on providing him with alternatives. I thoroughly enjoyed Highbury, meeting one of my favourite players, Frank McLintock. He was extremely influential, a strong personality interested in tactics. He took over on the field, understood what we were doing in training, someone you'd want to have anywhere. Other players were interested in improving – John Radford, George Eastham. Going to Arsenal for me was a big lift. Bertie gave me responsibility and I felt I could trust him." Peter Simpson, an emerging young central defender, echoes the transformation. "When Billy Wright was manager, there were no real tactics and the training was totally different, a bit of running and five-a-sides. Dave Sexton was fantastic."

Mee, never being one to seek publicity, was happy for his appointed man to be taking some of the limelight. He was, as yet, little known. At the press conference to announce his appointment, only two national newspapers were represented, and from Liverpool, the raucous Bill Shankly sneered: "They've appointed the medicine man." The balanced view came from Ken Friar, nowadays director, then assistant secretary to Bob Wall, who reflected: "We considered Bertie's man-management skills would be sufficient, along with the overall organisation and structure at the Club, to bring us success ... when making such decisions, what one is trying to do is to reduce the risk."

It was to be a swimmingly bright start to 1966/1967 for the Mee-Sexton regime, with three wins and a draw against Sunderland, West Ham United (home), Aston Villa and West Ham (away) respectively. The new Arsenal balloon was then punctured by old rivals Tottenham Hotspur 3-1 at White Hart Lane, where Spurs might have doubled their score. Jimmy Greaves and Cliff Jones, supported from midfield by Terry Venables and Dave Mackay, washed

through the Arsenal defence like a tide through sandcastles, Ian Ure in the centre was tormented by the wiles of Greaves and Alan Gilzean. The new Arsenal manager would set his heart on preventing, in future, the kind of football with which Spurs now destroyed his team. An early move to initiate this work was the signing of left-back Bob McNab, from Huddersfield Town, snatched from under the nose of Shankly. When McNab courteously telephoned Shankly from Mee's office to inform Liverpool's manager that he had decided in favour of Arsenal, he received a typical Shankly riposte: "You couldn't bloody well play in the first place, McNab." Mee's first selection, against Sunderland, had included only six players who had featured in Billy Wright's final game and now the wheels continued to turn. With George Graham, Chelsea's leading scorer the previous season, restless, Mee jumped at the chance to acquire him for £75,000, recouping a third of that in an exchange deal including Tommy Baldwin. An attraction for Graham had been the opportunity to work with Sexton.

By the time Arsenal faced Everton in early November, the pattern of Mee's objectives, irrespective of Sexton's coaching, was beginning to emerge. The formation at Goodison Park was 1-4-3-2: Terry Neill sweeping in behind two other centre-halves, Ure and Simpson, with McLintock, Sammels and Colin Addison (another new signing) forming the middle line with Radford and Graham up front. For four-fifths of a goalless match, Everton vainly battered at a defence that contained never less than eight and often 10 or 11 men. Arsenal had so many back in their penalty area that it looked like a window box of geraniums without the saving grace of being pretty. By now, too, criticism for negativity was beginning to close in on Mee, accentuating his dislike of the press, whom he considered too often manipulated the facts to suit their own argument. The feeling among headline writers, however, was becoming shared by even some on the Highbury terraces, never mind at away grounds. The criticism of Mee, now and in the future, would be magnified by press prejudice against his own modest playing experience. Arsenal went out of the League Cup in the third round, 3-1 at home to West Ham United – playing a side heavy with reserves – and lasted only as far as the fifth round in the FA Cup, falling 1-0 away to Birmingham City. Their final League position would be an acceptable seventh, with only two more goals conceded (47) than the champions, Manchester United. Goals for, on the other hand, told another story; only 58 from 42 matches compared to United's 84. Further formula adjustment would be required.

In the 1967/1968 season, that indeed happened, though primarily in defence and against a mounting volume of public disapproval for Arsenal's contribution to highprofile aggression which was disfiguring much of the domestic game at this time. Up front, development would remain static. In Mee's first season, the

leading scorers were Graham with 11, Sammels with 10 and McLintock with nine. In his second, the leading three were Graham (16), Radford (10) and Bobby Gould (six) – a disappointing tally not relieved by an often controversial passage to the final of the League Cup, in which they were predictably defeated 1-0 by Leeds United. Nor was the tenor of the dressing room improved by an ongoing dispute with Ian Ure over wages. Condemnation of Arsenal's style became a focus in their 1-0 defeat at Old Trafford in early October, with Ure and his compatriot Denis Law being sent off. The authorities were concerned that this brought the total already dismissed in the season to 16. Mee cautiously defended the commitment level of Ure and Law – "both tremendously talented players, both with volatile temperaments" – without condoning their violence. Dressing room sources suggest that the disciplinarian Mee would have fined any players sent off. Certainly the FA were concerned about mounting indiscipline; Ure and Law were each suspended for six weeks, the heaviest sentences imposed for more than 20 years and the most severe for any Arsenal player.

A significant change took place the following month with the replacement of Sexton – who departed for Chelsea to succeed the dismissed Tommy Docherty – by Don Howe, who had been coaching the reserves. Initially players were inclined to interpret Sexton's departure as indicating a lack of ambition within the Club. There was some resistance to a new regime under Howe, prior to this someone who was disregarded by the first-team squad, never mind that he was a distinguished international fullback with a growing coaching pedigree. It would take a verbal onslaught by Howe during training, after a few weeks of neutral relationships, to compel the players to heed his instructions. McLintock confirmed: "From then on you could tell he was in charge; he grabbed us by the scruff of the neck."

Shortly before Howe's promotion from the reserves, there had been two consecutive home wins, 2-1 against Sunderland and 5-3 against Fulham. In the victory over Sunderland, the value of Armstrong on the left flank had been conspicuous, his dipping near-post crosses a constant source of anxiety for the Irish Republic's centre-half Charlie Hurley and the redoubtable Jim Montgomery in goal. Howe's initiation, however, was marked by unpleasant confrontations with Burnley in the fifth round of the League Cup and then days later in the League. Two down after nine minutes in the Cup match at Turf Moor, Arsenal responded with goals by Graham (two) and McLintock in the next 10 minutes. McNab was sent off in the second half, Burnley forced a replay, and the ill mood continued into the League encounter, when McLintock and Peter Storey were both sent off. Denis Hill-Wood, Arsenal's chairman, observed publicly that he would not tolerate dirty players at Highbury, and a degree of frustration among

Arsenal's players at the referee's handling was alleviated when McLintock had his suspension quashed on appeal. Happily, the replay against Burnley passed without incident or animosity, Arsenal moving into the semi-final with a 2-1 victory. Arsenal had taken a half-hour lead with a goal that confirmed the growing authority of Radford as a central striker. He dived headlong beyond the far post to meet a dipping centre from Armstrong that cleared the goalmouth.

With semi-final victories home and away over Huddersfield Town, Arsenal contented themselves at the turn of the year with reaching the League Cup Final – their first final in 16 years. In between the two games, Bobby Gould, a boisterous if unrefined striker in Coventry City's promotion campaign under manager Jimmy Hill, was signed for a Club record fee of £90,000.

The reward for reaching Wembley was something of a mixed blessing; the opponents would be Leeds United, on the one hand as anxious for success as Arsenal in order to halt a growing reputation for falling at the final hurdle in any competition, on the other bearing the unwelcome label of one of the dirtiest teams in the country. Under the guidance of Don Revie, former adroit playmaker with FA Cup winners Manchester City, and the volatile leadership of Scottish midfielders Billy Bremner and Bobby Collins, Leeds had created a regime in which they were feared, literally, by everyone. The Wembley meeting of March 2, 1968, was the start of a series of bloodthirsty confrontations between the two clubs that would stretch over the next five years. Mee denied emphatically that, in their own search for success, their role model was Leeds, beyond asserting: "One would accept that Leeds have done the right and proper thing, and hope that we are on the same lines."

Whatever Mee's assertions, Arsenal were winning themselves few friends. Desmond Hackett wrote in the Daily Express, on a goalless draw at Newcastle United prior to the Wembley final: "The only people who could have extracted any joy from this affront to football must have been Leeds, who have the good fortune to oppose Arsenal in the League Cup Final." At the same time, Hackett was singularly unimpressed by the introduction of Gould. In 16 League matches, Gould's contribution to the season would be six goals. The incentive for Arsenal at Wembley, however, was that the winners were now granted entry to the European Fairs Cup.

Doubts about Mee's selection for Wembley centred on whether Jim Furnell would sufficiently recover from injury to take his place in goal, at the expense of deputy-in-waiting Bob Wilson, and whether Ure and Radford would likewise have recovered fitness. In the event, the line-up was: Furnell; Storey, Ure, Simpson, McNab; McLintock, Sammels, Armstrong; Jenkins, Radford, Graham. Substitute: Neill. Neill (who had missed only one game all season) was



distraught when told the previous day that he would now be excluded, so much so that he drove into the back of another car on the way home, sat reading private letters during Mee's team talk prior to kick-off, and stormed off the field at the end without waiting to collect his loser's medal. He later threw the medal into a waste bin, informing the media that "maybe I need a change of club". Leeds' victory was hardly a surprise. It was symptomatic of a drab match, as grey and unmemorable as the day itself, that the only goal, after 80 minutes, was scored by a full-back, Terry Cooper.

The remainder of the 1967/1968 season contained little of note. Poor form in early April was succeeded by victory in each of the final five games to secure a moderate ninth place behind champions Manchester City. Starting with an FA Cup replay against Birmingham in the fifth round on March 12, Wilson replaced Furnell in goal. Wilson had been the odd man out as a university graduate in duffel-coat and scarf, but now, following a five-year apprenticeship and only 10 first-team appearances, he was a player who was to gain unreserved admiration among his professional colleagues for his team spirit and selflessness. In the next four seasons he was to miss only a handful of games.

It could be said that after two seasons under Mee, Arsenal were a team in no-man's-land, neither genuine candidates for trophies nor contenders for the drop. Unknown to the public, there was about to take place an event of far-reaching consequence, during a pre-season spell at a training camp at Hennef, near Cologne in Germany. While Mee liked the isolation of the camp, drawing players closer together, the tactical revolution about to be put in place came from Howe. This was to abandon man-for-man marking and adopt the zonal system, as successfully used by England in the World Cup. Howe considered that the man-for-man system was draining for the defenders, particularly the centre-backs who were dragged here and there by strikers moving to the wings. The zonal system gave more watertight cover, and a key figure in helping to implement this switch on the field would be Bob McNab. For the central defenders, Simpson and Neill or Ure, it was a matter of "handing on" a striker to one or other of the full-backs if the opponent moved wide to the flanks. By now the steadfast Simpson was a regular, Neill and Ure competing for the other position. With Mee's full approval, Howe instilled the principles of the new system into the players during their spell at Hennef, but it would take some months before the human machinery was fully integrated.

Goals, however, had continued to remain at a premium, with only Graham and John Radford getting into double figures during the 1967/1968 season. Arsenal's abiding virtue by now was that any opposition would have to work themselves to a standstill for any chance of success. As McLintock reflects: "We

could play against anyone and never feel that we were in danger. We could run all day and no one could do the same at our level." Yet the upward curve of the graph remained slow-moving.

It was of mutual frustration to Mee, Howe and the players that they continued to be measured by the achievements of the past, by the deeds of the heroes of the Thirties: Alex James, Eddie Hapgood, Cliff Bastin and Ted Drake, Joe Mercer and Jimmy Logie post-war. Though Mee could ignore the bronze bust of Herbert Chapman that greeted every visitor to Highbury's Marble Halls every time he walked past it, there was no denying that players were haunted by their inheritance of ancient fame. It was at Mee's insistence that photographs of some of the old heroes were removed from a players' meeting room, from where they stared down imperiously on supposedly lesser mortals.

The 1968/1969 season began in some discomfort – notwithstanding the tactical innovation – with both Sammels and McLintock, established first-team figureheads, seeking to make a move. McLintock, having suffered his third defeat in a Wembley final, following two with Leicester City, began to think he might fare better in pastures new; Sammels was resentful at the continuous heckling he received from the terraces when the team's fortunes wavered. An essence of the professional game is sensing that you please the crowd, and when that emotion is denied, self-motivation can become impossible. However, the board, with chairman Hill-Wood adamant, was in no mood to release either player. In consequence, McLintock took his case to the Football League with the backing of the Professional Footballers' Association. His appeal was rejected, though he threatened further independent action. He personally did not have the best of starts, with an own goal in the opening 2-1 victory away to Spurs, but a sequence of eight wins and five draws in their first 14 matches, with defeat only to Leeds – one of the best opening spells in years – lessened the anxieties of both dissident players. Sammels was awarded a significant pay rise in a new two-year contract, which unfortunately served to gain him bad publicity, when his intention had been to raise the rewards for all the younger players. And if Arsenal believed they were on the way to the summit, this had been abruptly halted by the 2-0 defeat at Leeds on September 21. Without too much difficulty, Leeds, provocatively parading the League Cup before kick-off, removed Arsenal from the top of the table.

From that setback, Arsenal moved through eight League fixtures suffering only one defeat and conceding just three goals, before confronting Tottenham Hotspur in the semi final of the League Cup. A Highbury crowd of 55,000 witnessed Arsenal take a one-goal lead, through Radford, only two minutes from time in a negative game. An ugly second leg at White Hart Lane earned no

plaudits for either side, Radford again scoring to secure a draw and ensure a place in a second consecutive final. This would be against Third Division Swindon Town; in the meantime Arsenal lost in the FA Cup fifth round away to West Bromwich Albion. It was presumed by everybody but Swindon that the first trophy in 16 years was about to be delivered to Highbury. Opponents who had deservedly disposed of Burnley in the semi-final thought otherwise. Arsenal might make legitimate excuses for a shock defeat, a bout of influenza running through the dressing room in the week beforehand. Additionally, with torrential rain falling on a pitch that had been seriously damaged by an earlier Horse of the Year showjumping competition, Wembley had never looked in a worse state. The players were up to their ankles in mud when inspecting the pitch before the start, and there was an argument that the game should have been postponed from March 15. With hindsight, it could be said that Swindon's historic victory drove Mee and Howe into a phase of reassessment that was a base for triumphs yet to come. It was anything but the best team Mee had put on the field in his first three seasons in charge, including players such as Ure, prone to error at centre-half, and Gould, no more than a journeyman striker. Against them was ranged Don Rogers, a mercurial winger envied by all the best clubs in the land, and on Wembley's mud patch he would play havoc with Arsenal's ambitions.

The *Sunday Express* condemned Arsenal for being "slaves of their own system", yet defeat would convince Mee and Howe that the policy of foolproof defence, on which their coaching was based, had not to be abandoned, but intensified. And on this day, any deficiencies in attack would be magnified by the best performance of his career from Peter Downsborough in the Swindon goal. While no one could argue that it was the wrong result, Arsenal knew that there was plenty that could and had to be done to fulfil their long-term plans. Early Arsenal control of the game was knocked sideways after half-an-hour when Ure's mistake led to Roger Smart putting Swindon ahead. With little of the 90 minutes remaining, Gould equalised. A supreme individualist goal by Rogers in extra time buried Arsenal's hopes and when Rogers scored again near the end, humiliation was complete.

Enough was done in the remainder of the League season to finish fourth and ensure participation in the Fairs Cup – only Arsenal's second appearance in the European competition since the carousel had begun turning 13 years earlier. One significant late development had been the conversion of George Graham from the front line to a midfield role, a position in which he was to flourish, earning the nickname "Stroller" on account of his measured creative play. Moreover, his new function would open the way in the coming season, 1969/1970, for McLintock also to switch from being a tearaway attacking wing-half into an all-

seeing central defender. In these two changes could be identified the foundation stones of imminent renewed fame. Any question that Mee might think his move into management had fallen on stony ground was banished after the final game of the season, a single-goal defeat at Everton. Back in the hotel before returning to London, McLintock told his colleagues at dinner they should be proud "of the best season we've had since I've been here". Mee rose in response: "Frank, you started, so I'll finish. Some of you won't be here next year ... I want people who can win. Win!" He made clear that his ambitions were anything but perished and his rousing, almost daring words were a foretaste of the departure of Ure and others.

Mee was full of vigour as the 1969/1970 season approached. Yet his brave words initially would founder with only three wins in the first three months; for the first time his position appeared to be under threat. Spectators were leaving home matches long before the finish. Ure and Bobby Gould had departed, and though an away victory over Burnley stalled some of the criticism, it came at the cost of Bob Wilson breaking his arm, obliging Mee to sign Geoff Barnett, Everton's reserve keeper, for £35,000. In one sense, the lack of form was contradictory, because the new season had seen the introduction of the young Charlie George, a gifted teenager from a local school in Holloway, North London, where he had been taught by Wilson during the goalkeeper's own early days at Highbury. Like George Best, and Chelsea's Peter Osgood, George was symptomatic of a new socially liberated age: uninhibited, expressive, talented, the antithesis of everything represented by a disciplinarian Mee and soon to be idol of the fans on Highbury's North Bank. Their relationship would hover on the lip of mutual resentment, increasingly so as George's fame ascended. There was no denying his early impact, though, with six goals in his first season, even if he was on the fringe of the action prior to Christmas. He brought to the team a quality previously absent – unpredictability – which, with his latent anarchic attitude, soon made him the darling of the terraces. His appeal far exceeded that of Peter Marinello, a fleet-footed winger acquired from Hibernian in January 1970 for £100,000, who was never able wholly to lodge himself either in the crowd's affection or the manager's reliability calculations. In his first halfseason, Marinello scored once in 14 appearances and in 1970/1971 would appear only three times. Within the Mee-Howe regime, Marinello could never be a salient commodity, not in competition with George Armstrong, "Mr Predictable". Mee would later admit his purchase was a mistake. The manager would admit nothing, however, when confronted at the shareholders' meeting in late September – shortly before leaving for Lisbon and the Fairs Cup second-round first leg against Sporting Lisbon – by an accusation of inefficiency in the transfer

market, boring tactics and dirty play. His defence was characteristic of his team. Ure, he asserted, had been sold to Manchester United at an advantageous fee for a suspect player. Available strikers such as Allan Clarke and Wyn Davies had slipped through the net for a variety of reasons. And Arsenal would forego a physical challenge in pursuit of results, in favour of attractive play and 4-3 defeats, "if the other 40,000 in the crowd all felt like you". He claimed he and the Club scouts had scoured over 500 League matches and more than 350 school games in pursuit of talent.

Mee's self-confidence was about to be justified. A creditable goalless draw in Lisbon was followed by the 5-1 trouncing of Crystal Palace with a hat-trick from Radford. Even that contribution was overshadowed by a volley from George Graham that would earn him an ITV Golden Goal award. Next came a 4-0 home win over Derby County, and two goals from Graham in the home leg victory over Sporting. A door seemed to be opening. While League performances would not be sustained over the coming five months – Arsenal finishing a disappointing 12th behind champions Everton – their run in the Fairs Cup continued with the dismissal of FC Rouen, of France, and Dinamo Bacău, of Romania, with a combined goal aggregate of 10-1. Now Ajax lay in their path, the complex and formidable Amsterdam club led by the inspiring Johan Cruyff. Denis Hill-Wood had previously expressed anxieties about European involvement, given the wave of violence at many matches, but financial expediency had prevailed, and now Arsenal found themselves confronted by a team whose tactical basics were in such contrast with their own. If here indeed was a new Arsenal taking shape, it was apparent in their three-goal victory in the home leg, with two goals from the emergent George, the second a penalty. Peter Storey, mostly legitimately, subdued Cruyff.

Confining defeat in Amsterdam to a single goal, Arsenal would be closing their season with a third consecutive cup final, in this instance home and away to Anderlecht, of Belgium. With Anderlecht two up within half-an-hour of their home leg, the omens for Arsenal were grim. They were worse when it became three. There were only 12 minutes remaining when the 18-year-old Ray Kennedy, who had made only four previous appearances, was summoned in place of a limping George. With five minutes left, he rose to a cross from Armstrong to head a crucial goal. Back in the dressing room, Arsenal were at first dejected, but here was a moment when the full force of McLintock's personality would be brought to bear. Though beaten in four previous finals with Leicester City and Arsenal, McLintock, relishing his new role in the heart of defence, gave his colleagues a Churchillian off-the-cuff oration, convincing them that Kennedy's header had put victory within reach.

Their prospects were clouded over succeeding days by debate with UEFA on whether the regulation of away goals counting double still applied, whether they would need two goals merely to force a play-off rather than overall victory. Backed by Sir Stanley Rous, president of FIFA, a ruling was made in favour of Arsenal's away goal. An unchanged team ran out for the second leg, the atmosphere electric in front of nearly 52,000. A goal after half-an-hour, from a corner by Armstrong, knocked back by McLintock and hammered home by Kelly, put triumph within their grasp. A second, a header by Radford with 20 minutes remaining, all but made sure, then Jon Sammels added a third two minutes later, firing home from a pass by George.

"The winning of the Fairs Cup was the breaking of the spell, the burden from the past," reflects Bob Wilson, who had returned in December after breaking his arm. "We were brought up in the shadow of the Thirties, and Chapman's maxim that Arsenal should only be at the top. Now there was a massive weight off our shoulders, we could believe in our own abilities. Here was the completion of the perfect jigsaw – of the 13 or 14 regular players, we had only one free spirit, Charlie George, the rest of us tightly bound tactically, we would all die for each other. Charlie could produce the one moment that would win you a game. The importance of Frank as captain was massive. He wanted to do everything, be everything. He was perfect for captaincy, whether we were winning or losing. When we were three down in the first leg, Frank was suicidal, but when Ray scored for 3-1, suddenly he was Braveheart."

The season in which Arsenal would emulate their neighbours and rivals Spurs, achieving the elusive League and Cup Double, opened with a draw away to the defending champions, Everton. Arsenal's goalscorers, perhaps symptomatically, were George Graham and Charlie George. Not that it was otherwise an auspicious selection. Peter Simpson and Jon Sammels were both out of action with injuries. Terry Neill had left to become player-manager of Hull City; at the heart of defence, John Roberts replaced Simpson. Peter Storey operated in midfield to counteract Alan Ball, part of the trio, with Howard Kendall and Colin Harvey, who had fashioned Everton's title, and Pat Rice, understudy for three seasons, came in at right-back. Five matches later, Arsenal halted Leeds' run of maximum points, The Times laconically noting: "There were no goals and no bones broken at Highbury last night, though there might well have been one or two of both." Eddie Kelly was sent off for kicking Billy Bremner, but a resolute display by 10 men enabled Mee to observe: "This was the best performance I've seen by an Arsenal team against a side of the calibre of Leeds."

This was not to be the toughest event of the month, however. Playing in

Rome a fortnight later, against Lazio, in defence of the Fairs Cup, a friction-free goalless draw nonetheless led, during a post-match dinner, to Ray Kennedy being attacked by a Lazio player and a free-for-all developing on the pavement outside the restaurant. Lazio were fined by UEFA and lost the second leg 2-0. Fresh trouble, pointwise, was awaiting Arsenal in the League, their immediate visit to Stoke City resulting in a fivegoal drubbing, more than had been conceded in the previous four away games. Stoke at this time were riding on a high, and Arsenal were unable to quell the extrovert Peter Dobing who, even in the absence of George Eastham, ran the midfield.

The response of Mee and Howe to this reverse was not to wade into the players, but to invite them to indulge in a bout of self-examination. The players were unsparing in their dissection of each other's performances, and in a strange way this private team debate – in conjunction with the necessary physical self-defence on behalf of each other on the streets of Rome – generated an additional element of collective spirit. Wilson, who had become an analyst with BBC Television, unwisely discussed the five goals at Stoke with his viewers, and received a sharp dressing-down from Mee for his indiscretion. The outcome of the players' self-analysis, however, was a run of 14 games unbeaten stretching into January, which collected 25 points, and sustained their pursuit of Leeds at the head of the table.

The new year saw progress in the FA Cup at the expense of Yeovil Town, Portsmouth and Manchester City, with the prospect of a quarterfinal against Leicester City. It was around this time that Mee gave a warning, an evocative directive, to the players on how they should conduct themselves over the remainder of the season. "We'd gone from 12 points behind Leeds to getting level with them and were in the quarter-finals of the Cup," Wilson recalls. "Mee and Howe called us together, and he said, 'Look, you've got a chance here, if you dedicate yourselves for the next 12 weeks of your lives, of making history ... even at the expense of your family, if you want to go in the record book.'" Arsenal were aided at the turn of the year by Liverpool getting the better of Leeds in the League. With Charlie George growing in maturity by the week, there was every hope that the tide was flowing with Arsenal. It continued to do so in the Cup quarter-final against Leicester, an initial away draw followed by the only goal at Highbury, a header by George in front of 57,000. It could have been providential that the week after this Arsenal surrendered their hold on the Fairs Cup, going out on away goals to Cologne and thereby freeing their attention for the domestic Double.

Maximum focus would be required for the Cup semi-final against Stoke City, bearing in mind the earlier League disaster. Yet nerves took hold of Arsenal at

Hillsborough, and by half-time they were two down, Stoke seemingly in sight of their first major final. The damage was done by a deflected goal from Denis Smith and, inside the half-hour, an error by Charlie George that presented a gift to John Ritchie. Stoke deserved to go further ahead in the second half, but their lead was cut back when a long-range drive by Storey flew beyond the reach of Gordon Banks. Arsenal continued to labour, and an injured George needed to be replaced by Sammels. It was only during two minutes of added time that Arsenal kept open their path towards history. A disputed corner from Armstrong found an unmarked McLintock, whose sure header was handled on the line by John Mahoney. Arsenal's fate lay in the hands of Storey, who now needed to beat the incomparable Banks from the penalty spot. He did so, and Arsenal's day was saved. The tie moved to Villa Park, Liverpool having meanwhile defeated Everton in the other semi-final. In the replay, Arsenal took the lead with a Graham header, and in the second half a combination between Radford and Kennedy, neither of whom had scored in the previous seven matches, enabled Kennedy to ensure Arsenal's presence in the final of a cup competition for the fourth consecutive season. Once again the team owed a debt to their captain, McLintock, who convinced them at half-time, when they trailed at Hillsborough, that Stoke could be defeated.

Elsewhere, Leeds had lost to Chelsea in the League. Arsenal were now six points behind with three matches in hand, though they were away to Leeds in their third-to-last fixture. Prior to that they had a run of six victories and a draw. On April 17, their narrow home win over Newcastle United was accompanied by Leeds' controversial home defeat to West Bromwich Albion. Referee Ray Tinkler allowed Tony Brown, of Albion, to run through and score while the Leeds defence stood waiting for an offside decision against Colin Suggett. Tinkler, who was all but thrown to the ground by protesting Leeds players led by Bremner, ruled that Suggett had not been interfering with play. The crowd invaded the pitch and only then did the Leeds players move to protect Tinkler instead of attacking him. Leeds were fined £750 and ordered to play their opening four games the following season on a neutral ground. Alan Ashman, Albion's droll manager, reasoned that Suggett seldom interfered with play at any time. The scene was set for a clash of unmitigating willpower at Elland Road. Unforgiving though the challenge from both sides would be, conduct was contained within legal boundaries. It was only in the final minutes that Jack Charlton, deliberately obstructing the goalkeeper's sight line, as was his persistent habit, squeezed the ball home while Arsenal appealed for offside. Charlie George was booked for hoofing the ball into the stand, while his colleagues verbally and physically abused Arsenal's tradition of proper



behaviour. Replays confirmed that Norman Birtenshaw, the referee, was correct, McNab having played Charlton onside. Birtenshaw could face handling Arsenal in the Cup Final without qualms. If Arsenal had temporarily lost their cool, not so their manager. All but overpowered back at the team's hotel by media and public, he deflected everyone by saying: "My first duty is to my team and I will take care of them first. I will speak to you all later."

On the final Saturday of the League season, Leeds defeated Nottingham Forest while Arsenal won at home to Stoke. This left Arsenal one point adrift but with a game in hand, two days later against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane. A win would give Arsenal 65 points, one more than Leeds. A draw would leave the two equal. Yet while a goalless draw would maintain Arsenal's goal average a fraction above their rivals, any scoring draw would hand the title to Leeds.

Never mind 80 years of rivalry, the match was not without an added incentive for Spurs, who at that time were the only club to have won a League and Cup Double – a record they wanted to protect. Such was the frenzy of interest that the gates were locked long before kick-off, with 51,992 inside and as many outside jamming Tottenham High Road. Kevin Howley, the referee, had to abandon his car a mile away and walk the rest of the way.

In a taut encounter, with little conceded either way, McLintock managed to subdue the taller Martin Chivers, while Charlie George forced Pat Jennings in the Spurs goal to be at his most alert. Chances were few and the goalless draw that would be sufficient for Arsenal seemed on the cards until three minutes from the end. Now Jennings made the save of the evening as Radford shot from George's cross. The parried ball seemed to have run for a corner but Armstrong caught it on the goalline, chipped into the goalmouth and Kennedy's header dipped home off the underside of the bar. For the remaining moments, Arsenal weathered the Spurs pressure which might have brought the goal that would hand Leeds the title. Instead, it was Arsenal's, for a record eighth time. Such were the celebrations as the crowd poured onto the pitch that Don Howe became anxious for his players' safety prior to the Cup Final. Spurs generously ferried champagne to the visitors' dressing room and shared in the celebrations. Some months later, Bob Wilson, discussing Arsenal's achievement with Norman Hunter, of Leeds, asked him: "How was it we won when you were the better side?" To which Norm 'Break-ye-leg' replied: "Because we had a goalkeeper who threw them in [Gary Sprake], and in Radford and Kennedy you had the best strike force." And so to Wembley and the Cup Final. A race was on for Peter Storey to recover in time; his tenacity would be vital in a confrontation with a Liverpool team not averse to intimidation. Their manager Bill Shankly was up to

his old psychological tricks the day beforehand, when the teams visited the stadium to inspect the pitch during a shower. "It will be a nightmare for goalkeepers here tomorrow," muttered Shankly in the ear of Bob Wilson. He had picked the wrong target in the season's outstanding custodian, while Arsenal retaliated by delaying their exit from the dressing room into the tunnel leading to the pitch, leaving Shankly and his men fretting while Mee allegedly concluded his team talk. For all their composure, however, Arsenal were short of their best, only George Graham rising to the occasion with an assurance that earned him the man-of-the-match award.

It was he who so nearly resolved a goalless 90 minutes, his header from Radford's long throw clearing Ray Clemence in goal but rebounding from the bar. Tommy Smith hooked the ball away for a corner from which Armstrong found Graham's head again. This time Alec Lindsay cleared off the line.

Early in extra time, Steve Heighway, on Liverpool's left flank, for once freed himself from the attention of Pat Rice and cut in acutely from the left. Wilson, covering the near post, expected Heighway to pull the ball back for Toshack. "In 42 League games that season, I'd let in only 29 goals, I'd made very few mistakes," Wilson remembers. "Sadly, one now came in the Final, and it could have been disastrous, costing Arsenal the Double. I still think of myself in terms of Dan Lewis, who cost Arsenal the Cup in 1927, losing his hold on the ball because of his shiny new jersey, but I was lucky because we turned it around. Within two minutes of letting in a bad goal, I made an important save from Brian Hall. It could have become 2-0, but within another two minutes we scored a freak equaliser." What had happened was that Heighway, a player known for intelligence, seeing the slightest gap, shot between Wilson's right hand and the post.

Within minutes, Wilson did indeed avert certain defeat, defying Hall's close-range shot. Meanwhile, on the bench, Don Howe, sensing that Arsenal needed to produce something different to stage a recovery, was sending a message for George Graham to push further forward. Close to the extra-time change of ends, Radford hooked into a crowded Liverpool penalty area, where Eddie Kelly half-hit an attempted ball and turned in celebration as it crossed the line. Video replays, new to the television screen, revealed that Graham never touched the ball and the goal belonged to Kelly. With the scores level, and the intense heat on a sunny day having exhausted the players on Wembley's spongy turf, Howe opted to withdraw Graham to a deeper position and push an exhausted Charlie George back up front, playing for a replay. Unaware of any tactical considerations and with nine minutes remaining, George interchanged passes with Radford before letting fly with an arrow of a shot from just beyond the 18-

yard line. As the ball took a minor deflection off central defender Larry Lloyd, Clemence was left helpless. The boy who was Highbury's own had snatched the Double, and he lay there horizontally on the turf, arms aloft in statuesque pose, drunk with joy.

Amid the euphoria that followed Arsenal's emulation of Tottenham Hotspur 10 years earlier, the highest platform was occupied by Bertie Mee. Domestic fulfilment was to be only half-way there. Now he could contemplate joining the likes of Jock Stein, Matt Busby and Bill Nicholson with triumph in European competition. His partnership with Howe, he fondly supposed, was about to tackle fresh challenges. Sadly, it was not. Within a short time Howe had leapt at the offer to join his old club, West Bromwich Albion, following the sacking there of Alan Ashman. It was a rupture of the Highbury architecture almost as extreme as the death of Chapman nearly 40 years earlier. There was no debate, no possibility of compromise. Mee was on holiday and, by the time he returned, Howe was gone.

Adding insult to injury, Howe took with him George Wright, the trainer, and youth team coach Brian Whitehouse, under whom the juniors had just won the FA Youth Cup. To this day, opinions vary on Howe's motives. He subsequently denied that he envied Mee's job, but admitted: "I did want to manage in my own right, but I wasn't in a hurry. Being manager of Arsenal was my ambition, but I would have been prepared to wait. All it needed was a promise that when Bertie finished I would have been offered the chance. That was never said." Howe would ultimately become manager at Highbury, but that was not to happen until some 13 years later. Meanwhile, Mee swiftly promoted Steve Burtenshaw, reserve team coach, as replacement, with Ian Crawford, a former Scotland Under 23 international, taking charge of the youth side.

As if Mee did not have enough to contend with, the tenor of Arsenal's play was about to require adjustment, with the announcement by the League of a memorandum for referees demanding more severe response to a variety of offences, including obstruction and over-robust tackling. Arsenal had become embroiled, in common with other clubs, most notably Leeds, in an unwritten code that tolerated, indeed expected, a raised level of physical challenge. This was about to be checked. On one day alone, three players were sent off, including George Best at Chelsea for "verbals", and 38 others booked. Before the end of the year, bookings would reach four figures. In spite of the furore, none could deny that the purge was overdue and beneficial.

Although Arsenal began the 1971/1972 season with an encouraging 3-0 win over Chelsea, they soon ran into a lean spell, the lowest point of which was a 5-1 hammering at Wolves in mid-November. With injuries to George, McNab,

Simpson and Radford, form continued to fluctuate. The assurance of the previous season had gone, and none could accurately judge to what extent this was due to a sense of anti-climax. Given the horizons in Europe, nonexistent in Chapman's day, this ought not to have been so, and even if hopes of retaining the League title dwindled – they would eventually finish fifth behind surprise champions Derby County, led by Brian Clough – the stage was still set for them in two major cup competitions (their League Cup campaign had ended in a fourth-round replay against Sheffield United).

To rally his by-now less than dominant forces, Mee made a surprise move the week before Christmas, acquiring Alan Ball, World Cup hero of 1966 and the workaholic of Everton's midfield. The diminutive Ball would have been competitive had he been a village postman, and Mee calculated that his injection of volcanic energy into the Arsenal ranks might enliven long-term European prospects. The move was as much a surprise on the Highbury terraces as it was a stunning revelation for Ball, Everton's manager Harry Catterick having bluntly announced he was dispensable. The fee was £220,000.

His arrival, however, was too late for him to be eligible for the impending European Cup quarter-final against Ajax, Norway's Strømsgodset IF and Grasshopper Zürich having already been comfortably dispatched. Ajax were to bury Mee's dream, their gifted nucleus of international technicians – Johan Cruyff, Rudi Krol, Johnny Rep and Ari Haan – winning both home and away. Stefan Kovacs, coach of Ajax, was dismissive of Arsenal's lack of imagination.

European elimination added to the downbeat mood from an inadequate defence of their League title. All that remained for continued prestige was the FA Cup. Early progress had been protracted; away victories over Swindon Town and Reading were followed by the need for three matches to dispose of high-flying Derby. The second replay, at Filbert Street, was won with the only goal from Ray Kennedy. The first replay, at the Baseball Ground, had been obscenely dirty, with both teams offending. Charlie George deserved censure, that was not forthcoming, for throwing V-signs at Derby spectators.

Drawn away again, for the 18th time in their last 21 appearances out of the hat, there was the short journey to Leyton Orient, who were threatened with relegation to the Third Division. Their fortunes, having earlier disposed of Chelsea, were terminated by the only goal from Ball. Now came a semi-final, once more with Stoke City, who had already claimed their first trophy in over a century by winning the League Cup and were reinforced since the semi-final the previous year by veterans Peter Dobing, Alex Elder and George Eastham, who had returned to the English game from South Africa. This time, as before, it required a replay. Charlie George, with a penalty, and Radford supplied the goals

in a 2-1 win at Goodison Park. The first match had been survived in spite of injury to Bob Wilson, Radford having taken over in goal for the last 15 minutes.

A fifth cup final in five years, and the second against Leeds, beckoned. The incentive for Arsenal, besides retaining the trophy, was to strike a blow against their harshest foe in order to end the prospect of Leeds achieving the Double. Though Leeds were to fail, it would be on account of losing their final League match away to Wolves, surrendering the title by a point to Derby, already abroad on holiday. For the Centenary final at Wembley, Arsenal were not up for it on the day, and the only goal, from Allan Clarke of Leeds early in the second half, resolved what was for much of the time a one-sided affair. It was apparent that a difference between the two clubs, in a season of restricted physical hustling, was Leeds's possession in Johnny Giles, Eddie Gray, Clarke and Peter Lorimer of a deeper element of intrinsic skill. There was no argument who deserved to win, Ball and George Graham were unable to assert themselves in the crucial central third of the field, while up front Radford, George and Armstrong made little impact on the renowned Leeds back line of Paul Reaney, Jack Charlton, Norman Hunter and Paul Madeley.

A strange sense of unease occupied the minds of some players prior to the 1972/1973 season, never mind the run of cup finals and a League position of fifth, narrowly insufficient for European qualification. During the summer, George and Kelly were both put on the transfer list, lack of financial reward being at the heart of their unrest. They would be joined, not far into the season, by McLintock. The arrival of Ball, and his elevated wages, had accelerated dissatisfaction in the dressing room, an arena where there are seldom any secrets. Unease was also heightened by Mee's unilateral decision – stung by the criticism by Ajax – to instil a more entertaining style of play. This, it could be said, was a volte-face several years too late, and badly timed in the team's early stage of redevelopment. Innovation might have had a better chance during the regime of Howe: to force the fluid football of the Dutch on to Burtenshaw was a gamble, the more so when Ball had yet to settle into a clearly defined role.

"It had been difficult to even think of leaving Everton, yet Arsenal had just done the Double and were a formidable side, and the move appealed once I accepted I was not wanted at Goodison," Ball reflects. "It was hurtful, but football's a business, and there was the consolation that it was a British record fee. I found a strong bunch of players, but it was totally different from Everton. Arsenal's strength was getting the ball up to Radford and Kennedy or wide to Armstrong, and I found it very frustrating having been at the centre of everything with Everton. The dressing room can be a tough place and there was a feeling from the others, not of resentment, but of 'do we need this guy, he

wants the ball all the time'. I could understand, but I couldn't change. I was pleading all the time: 'If we're going into Europe, we have to mix it up, if you stay the same you will get found out'. It's difficult to change people's mindset. I let Bertie know what I thought, I was playing for my reputation. I got on OK with Burtenshaw, yet I was trying to show the other players what I was."

Certainly the change in style for a while suited Ball. Five goals were put past Wolves in the opening home game, victory over Stoke made it three in a row and the first defeat arrived only in the eighth game, away to Newcastle United. Yet as Burtenshaw would admit: "It needed more than Ball, and playing through midfield, fully to effect a transformation. And Bertie repeatedly discovered that the money that he was prepared to pay was insufficient to attract the kind of players we needed to do the job."

That a successful formula was still distant was evident in a goalless home draw against Liverpool in mid-September, even if the lack of physical intimidation on both sides was a welcome advent. While Jeff Blockley, a newly acquired central defender from Coventry City, might have had a neat touch, many on Highbury's terraces preferred the more oldfashioned, direct approach of Peter Simpson alongside McLintock. When, in late November, Arsenal went out of the League Cup to Second Division Norwich City and were then thrashed 5-0 at Derby, Mee capitulated.

For the visit of Leeds to Highbury a week later, the prosaic but dependable Armstrong replaced Peter Marinello, while Kennedy's partnership with Radford was restored at the expense of George, never mind that both he and Kelly had resolved their pay disputes. The most far-reaching team change against Leeds, however, was Mee's decision to drop McLintock in favour of the expensive Blockley. It was the manner of his action which reduced the most dynamic player in the Club to a state of disbelief and anger. McLintock, characteristically, had been critical of elements of the team's training, and of a lack of effort by some players. There was a suspicion, even, by Mee or Burtenshaw, that he might have been angling for their job. McLintock said: "He took me all the way up to Birmingham City, two days before Christmas, only then saying that he was leaving me out. He made me feel like a 17-year-old."

It was to be the end of a career as remarkable as any in Arsenal's history as McLintock was thereafter reduced to being reserve for either Simpson or Blockley. A loyal Bob McNab, reasoning with Mee to restore his colleague, said to Mee: "He has fought and died for you and now you expect him to take it lying down." Before the end of the season, McLintock crossed London to Queens Park Rangers for £25,000, and subsequently would help them all but win the League title. Prior to that move, Graham had departed to Manchester United for

£120,000. The boughs of Mee's Double tree were falling as if struck by lightning. In his justification, however, this did not prevent a sustained run following the Derby defeat, which over five months saw only three losses: West Bromwich Albion away (February 28), Derby again, at home (March 31), and Leeds away on the last day of the season (May 9). This enabled Arsenal to finish an unexpected second, only three points behind Liverpool, whom they had beaten 2-0 at Anfield in February. When Arsenal won 1-0 at home to Crystal Palace towards the end of March, they were level on points with Liverpool. At the same time, Cup aspirations had survived against Leicester City, Bradford City, Carlisle United and Chelsea, the first and fourth of these ties requiring replays. By the time of the semifinal against Second Division Sunderland, Ball was performing at full throttle. Could Arsenal make it a sixth final in six seasons? Errors by an unfit Blockley, however, undermined the defence; from one of these Vic Halom gave Sunderland the lead. Billy Hughes increased this in the second half and a goal from an underperforming George six minutes from time was too little and too late. Sunderland moved on to their astonishing Wembley triumph over Leeds. How different might it have been for Arsenal had McLintock not been injured the previous week against Derby, and was, therefore, unavailable to replace the struggling Blockley.

The undercurrent of disagreement with the work of Steve Burtenshaw as coach, as provocatively expressed by McLintock, came to a head early at the start of the 1973/1974 season, and it surprised few when Mee replaced him with the more personable Bobby Campbell. The former Arsenal striker, now 36, had been assistant to Gordon Jago in gaining promotion from the Second Division for Queens Park Rangers. The opinion of McLintock had been substantiated in conversation with Mee by Wilson, Armstrong and Ball. Changing coach produced a drastic change in fortunes. Arsenal were removed from the League Cup at the first attempt by Tranmere Rovers, and from the FA Cup by Aston Villa in a fourth-round replay, and finished a dispiriting 10th in the League behind champions Leeds.

Mee pleaded that the financial expectations of players, their demands and their manipulation by agents, were now confounding the duties of management. What was to become an internal thorn, on the other hand, was the aggressive demeanour of Campbell, his invective on arrival against many established players made no less offensive by being told by McNab in no uncertain terms that he didn't know what he was talking about. The one bright spark in the season was the emergence of young Liam Brady, an Irish genius in midfield who was to help bring to Highbury some of Arsenal's brightest days. But these lay way ahead.

An unexpected consequence of a comparatively poor season was the decision during the summer to dispose of Ray Kennedy, at 22 still short of his prime years. His winning goal at Liverpool in April had ensured the League title for Leeds, but though he had played in all 46 of Arsenal's League and Cup games, Mee must have considered his tally of 13 goals in partnership with Radford was inadequate. Liverpool snapped at the chance to replace John Toshack, and another branch of the Double team had gone.

For the opening game of the 1974/1975 season, less than half of the team who had started against Liverpool at Wembley in the Doublewinning season three years earlier were included in the opening line-up against Leicester City. The only goal was scored by Brian Kidd, a teenager in Manchester United's European Cup triumph six years earlier. Although he was to score 19 goals in 40 appearances, alongside only seven by Radford in 29, it was to prove insufficient to keep Arsenal out of relegation danger. The sale of Kennedy would never be understood; the less so when he developed a new career in midfield, winning 17 England caps and a host of club medals on Merseyside. An unhappy Mee merely moved from one problem to another, among them a transfer request by Blockley and his move, after two chequered years, to Leicester for £80,000, and a new transfer request from George. Unrest in the dressing room was selfevident; there were rumours – denied by Denis Hill-Wood – that Sir Alf Ramsey, recently sacked by England, would be offered the Highbury seat.

In an attempt to halt the decline, Terry Mancini, an ageing central defender, was signed from Queens Park Rangers. Mancini was a defender of heart more than class, and Mee was now riding in the desperation stakes. Alex Cropley, a midfielder signed from Hibernian, played only seven games before breaking a leg. Some relief from League anxiety came in the FA Cup, but even that was laboured, victories over York City and then Coventry requiring two attempts each, and three against Leicester. George Armstrong scored his first goals in nearly two years to help win the replay against Coventry, while the only goal from Radford finally saw off Leicester to put Arsenal in the last eight at home to West Ham United. This uplift was marred by the sending-off two days previously at Derby of Ball and McNab. Mee's decision not to support the players' appeals proved to be a lasting wound for Ball. The appeals enabled both players to appear in the quarter-final against West Ham United, but the Hammers became the first London club ever to win at Highbury in the FA Cup, with two goals from Alan Taylor. West Ham went on to defeat Fulham in the final.

The struggle to remain in the First Division was less than pretty. Ken Furphy, manager of Sheffield United, condemned the opposition for their narrow victory at Highbury. "I never thought I would see the day when Arsenal players fought



among themselves ... and so freely indulged in foul tactics." The goal was from Kidd, and his two in the next game at home to Coventry City were crucial to survival. Meanwhile, down the road in the Midlands, Don Howe was losing his job with Albion.

The last straw for North Bank fans, it might be said, was news in the close season that George was about to join Spurs. Then Dave Mackay stepped in with a £90,000 bid from Derby and the worst embarrassment was avoided. In six seasons with Arsenal, George had played only 169 games, such had been his equivocal nature in a fluctuating relationship with Mee. At the same time, McNab was allowed a free transfer to Wolves and, before departing, warned Mee to "watch his back". Dressing room morale was at its lowest ebb, partially on account of a perceived liaison between Ball and chief coach Campbell. With Mee receding into the background – "we saw less and less of him", recalled Brady – that worst malaise was growing, the existence of cliques among players. Though Ball and Campbell were said to be plotting a takeover, Ball submitted a transfer request and was omitted at the start of the 1975/1976 season, with Kelly becoming captain. With seven defeats in the first 16 matches, Arsenal were heading for the rapids. Ball was recalled, Kelly was disgruntled and left to join McLintock at QPR. Two more young Irishmen who were to build fine careers, central defender David O'Leary and striker Frank Stapleton, were introduced in an attempt to stop the rot.

Eliminated at the first attempt from the League Cup, by Everton, and the FA Cup, by Wolves, the team floundered, distress deepened by the sight across town of McLintock leading QPR to within one point of the title, won by Liverpool. Loyalty was dissolving to the stage where Storey, dropped after an away defeat to Norwich City in February and suspended after going awol for 10 days, announced on his return that he would never play for the Club again. There was a mini-revival with the 6-1 thrashing of West Ham on March 20, shortly after Mee had stirred his players, for the first time in months, with a morale-raising address. Two days later the public was shocked to read of his decision to retire at the end of the season. This was, in the tradition of a Club always attentive to dignity and courtesy, no more than camouflage.

Mee had been informed by Hill-Wood that, in view of three successive seasons of struggling at the wrong end of the table, Arsenal would be looking for a new coach at the end of the season. What was not apparent for another two or three weeks was that Hill-Wood had already made the decision to approach Miljan Miljanic, the Montenegrin coach of Real Madrid, and former mastermind of Red Star Belgrade. Hill-Wood had fought with Yugoslavia's partisans in World War II and was an admirer of their tenacity. He had been advised of the

availability of Miljanic in mid- February, and had made a clandestine trip to Madrid to interview him.

Miljanic would have become England's first high-profile foreign coach but for a misunderstanding. Having made it known that he had the approval of Santiago Bernabeu, Real's president, to discuss terms with Arsenal, Miljanic unthinkingly signed an extension to his contract while Hill-Wood was contemplating the position. Negotiations with Arsenal nonetheless continued for the next three months, even to the extent that Hill-Wood delayed appointing a new manager until after the start of the following season in the hope that Miljanic might break with Real. In the event, after further visits to London, Miljanic decided not to breach his renewed agreement. In the meantime, Arsenal, still the only club never to have been relegated from the First Division, had won a crucial match at home to Wolves, who were similarly threatened. Mancini's only first-team goal and another by Brady saved Arsenal and condemned Wolves.

Thus concluded, in the shadows, Bertie Mee's turbulent but distinguished career. He had helped to recapture pride and prestige, but Arsenal's style, built in conjunction with Don Howe on rugged defence and the counter-attack game, had run into difficulties, precipitated by the controversial departure of such key figures as McLintock, Kennedy and George. The regret for Mee was that he was not invited to remain at Highbury in some capacity. Hill-Wood considered that the retention of a retiring manager was ill-advised.

**David Miller**

## INTERVIEW

# **The driving force**

**Frank McLintock's leadership was a key component in the success of Bertie Mee's team, inspiring the side's fightback to win the Fairs Cup in 1970, and the Double a year later**

Some players, such as Stanley Matthews, Bobby Charlton and Thierry Henry, dominate the game through the immense scale of their skill. Others, such as Stan Cullis, of Wolverhampton Wanderers, and Dave Mackay, of Tottenham Hotspur, have done as much by the sheer size of their personality. Frank McLintock was one of the latter. Not that Cullis, Mackay or McLintock lacked skill, but they drove themselves and their colleagues in such an inspirational way that they could change the shape of a game, of a season, of a club. McLintock's contribution to the history of Arsenal, over nine seasons between October 1964 and April 1973, is immeasurable. Those players who shared the field with him at that time, and before and after with Leicester City and then Queens Park Rangers, will testify that they are indebted to him for his unending example, epitomising the spirit of the game.

When he arrived at Highbury as an all-action wing-half, it was against a background of moderate achievement but mounting frustration at Leicester, where he had experienced two losing FA Cup Finals, against Double winners Spurs in 1961 and Manchester United two years later. Leicester's football under wily manager Matt Gillies was imaginative and colourful, but McLintock, having risen from the humblest surroundings in Glasgow, possessed an insatiable ambition to reach the top of his game. He immediately sensed, with Arsenal, that destiny was beckoning. "We went on a pre-season tour in Scandinavia, and there was this coachload of supporters following us," he recalls. "I realised what a big club this was. At Leicester, there would not be a single person waiting for you when you got home. You could tell Arsenal were the aristocrats: the oak-panelled walls of the office of Bob Wall, the general secretary, the heated flooring in the dressing rooms, the in-house X-ray machines, never seen at any club 40 years ago, the treatment room so immaculate you could have had an operation there. When we flew abroad, the squad would be divided in two planes in view of the risk of a crash. When you were injured, Bertie Mee, the physiotherapist, allowed no newspapers, tea or biscuits in the treatment room. You were made to exercise every muscle in your body, apart from the injury. You knew it was right, you were knackered after 200 sit-ups if you had, say, a knee injury, and you dreaded having to be there."

There was that air of elitism for which McLintock instinctively longed, but

beneath the surface all was not well. "On the one hand, everything was great, but unfortunately Billy Wright, the manager, and his coach Les Shannon had no previous club experience. Here were two inexperienced men taking over an institution. I felt sorry for them. It was a shambles, and they were grasping at straws. The training was too hard, nothing was really in place, with no one knowing quite what they expected of you. They were particularly tough with the youngsters like Jon Sammels, George Armstrong and John Radford, while older players could get away with things. I genuinely feel sad for Billy; it was too big a job too soon for a new man."

The inevitable end awaited Wright, sacked at the end of his fourth season, to be replaced by Mee. "We never expected this, we supposed the board would pick the best, a Ramsey or a Revie. We nearly fainted when we heard who it was. We knew he didn't know much about football, but that he was a strict disciplinarian. He addressed you like the Army man he'd been: 'McLintock!' Yet he was intelligent, a superb organiser and he took to it like a duck to water. Wisely, he picked Dave Sexton as his coach, which was great for us; suddenly there was light at the end of the tunnel. Bertie never talked a great deal, never interfered with Dave or later with Don Howe. He knew they were excellent, so he gave them their head. One day Dave missed his train from Brighton, and Bertie took over the training. It was a shambles. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I'm not very good at this – so get on the track and start running.' He told Dave never to miss his train again. He always kept his distance. If he appeared on the horizon at training, the tempo involuntarily rose, he was so respected. In private, he could slaughter you if there'd been some problem [over behaviour], he'd be shivering with rage."

Along with the rest of the first-team players, McIntock was distraught when Sexton departed to succeed Tommy Docherty at Chelsea. "We thought, why are they allowing this, we're supposed to be the Arsenal. Dave had been so in charge. He'd worked a lot on attacking play, he had film after film of the Hungarians of the 1960s. He preferred man-to-man marking, which we didn't much like, even though it suited the Italians, but it improved the side. We were heading in the right direction. His replacement by Don Howe was another bombshell. Don had just retired as a player and had been coaching the reserves. We gave him a bad time for a week or so. Then he retaliated, challenging us head-on. 'I'm fed up with you lot complaining about Dave going,' he yelled at us. 'Now you've got me, so on yer bikes, and start moving'."

With Howe's regime accepted, Arsenal began to climb the ladder, confirmed by their reaching the League Cup final of 1968, in which they met Leeds United. "We were there, but not quite there, and reckoned that we were finding our feet when we were back again at Wembley a year later facing Swindon Town.

Circumstances got the better of us. I'd thought beforehand, in my fourth final: 'This is my chance of history', but before the end of the game my legs had gone."

Despite this second setback, Arsenal by now knew in their hearts that they were on their way to achieving something worthwhile. Having qualified for the Fairs Cup, they went all the way to the final, home and away against Anderlecht, in 1970. Disaster struck when, in the first leg in Brussels, they found themselves 3-0 down in the second half. "They'd probed us for the first 20 minutes or so, passing the ball around square, and we'd thought, OK, that's fine. Then ping, we're one down. A bit unlucky, we reckoned. It's all nice and quiet, and then ping, we're two down. Too late we realised that was their style, the sudden counter-attack. With 10 minutes remaining, young Ray Kennedy came on. We started to put in a few crosses, and every time [we did] we could see fear in the eyes of their defenders. Suddenly they looked shaky, their big centre-half couldn't play for toffee, and Ray scored to make it 3-1."

Back in the dressing room, the team was despondent, until McLintock waded into them. Wound up with emotion, he told his colleagues that they could turn Anderlecht over in the return leg. "I was totally convinced, and in the event we played the most perfect game at home I've ever known, played at a high tempo. Their players were astonished, they thought we were on drugs. There was such a feeling at Highbury – 60,000 inside and thousands locked out. It was an important moment for us. That game created the platform for doing the Double, the platform the Club has retained to this day. Seventeen years was a long time to be without a trophy, and the Fairs Cup victory gave the players confidence, and it gave the management confidence."

McLintock acknowledges the huge contribution by Don Howe. "He'd only been coach a year-and-a-half, but he did a brilliant job. He changed the defensive system from man-to-man marking to zonal. If it's not done correctly, you're in trouble. In training, he started with one against one, playing on half a pitch, Simpson against Radford, me against Kennedy. If we dived into a tackle and missed, there'd be 30 press-ups – an essential element with Don was that you had to stay on your feet, not get floored. He introduced the system slowly over several months, two against two, four against four, then our back four against six or even eight forwards, with Bob Wilson doing the talking behind us. It never stopped, and it was a masterpiece. Don never rushed us. George Graham did the same when he later became manager, and he built a brilliant back four."

As the team developed, McLintock had moved from his role at wing-half to central defence, alongside Peter Simpson. His creative touch from the back line was fundamental to Arsenal's counter-attacking policy. "After defensive training,

we would switch to forward movement. Radford and Kennedy would start their runs, short or long, before I got the ball. I'd know, from the way they turned, what they were doing, which one to pick off. It was like clockwork."

Additionally, there was extensive work on offside tactics, an aspect that earned the team much unpopularity, but was tellingly effective. "The system was that Pat Rice and Bob McNab at full-back had to stay just ahead of a line through me and Simpson, so that the trap was operated by us, as we called to each other. We had to be extra clever. When we played against West Ham and Geoff Hurst, say, Peter or I would go with him when he made a run, then move up just as Brooking or Peters made the pass, and Geoff would be left 10 yards offside. He would find himself in a situation where he could neither make a run nor receive the ball to his feet. He told us he'd never seen a job done like it."

McLintock is particularly proud that the team was one without cliques, was united at all times, including even the idiosyncratic Bob Wilson, a former amateur from Loughborough College and "the only one with joined-up handwriting", who was not a regular football type, never shared the orderly drinking sessions yet was steadfastly 'one of the lads'. That unity was vital in the run-in to the Double.

"We had this terrific match up at Leeds towards the end, and we held them until the last few minutes, when Jack Charlton scored and we were convinced he was offside. We were all fuming on the bus going home, but Bob McNab admitted he'd been slow moving out and probably played Jack onside, and video film confirmed this. So now it came down to the final League game at White Hart Lane. The way that we played always made it a very draining game physically. Against Spurs we had to win or keep a scoreless draw. The tension was huge. The crowds were queuing at the ground from midday. I let my wife on to the bus to the ground, and Bertie protested. Typical of him, no sentiment. The game was a credit to both sides, though I genuinely thought we had the upper hand. Near the end I had a chance to score, but clattered into the referee. At that moment I'd seen in my mind's eye the fame – 'McLintock wins title' – but I was sprawled on the ground. Ray got the winner when Geordie Armstrong robbed Joe Kinnear and crossed the ball."

So on to Wembley and the prospect of emulating Spurs and achieving the Double. "I'd felt wonderful at White Hart Lane, but when it came to the Cup Final I felt absolutely exhausted, though I'd just been made Footballer of the Year. We'd had little rest in preparing to meet Liverpool. Bill Shankly, their manager, had boasted that we would be playing 'against the fittest team in the land'. When Steve Heighway put them ahead in the first half of extra time, thanks to an unusual error by Bob Wilson, I thought: 'The jinx, here we go



again!'. On a sunny day with no wind, the heat was unbearable. I was trying to drag the team forward, we were all flagging, and then we equalised with the most wonderful and the worst goal imaginable, off Kelly's knee with George Graham claiming a touch which he never had. Then Charlie George, who'd had a quiet game other than a few long-range efforts over the bar, suddenly struck his glorious winner – the only man in the side with that shooting power. As he famously lay on the turf in celebration, I'm thinking: 'We don't do things like that at Arsenal, for God's sake get up because I haven't got the strength to run 50 yards to congratulate you'."

McLintock, nowadays a commentator on television and radio, is sceptical about the allegation that players from his era would not survive in the elevated fitness regime of today. "It's the reverse. I don't think the players of today could have played in our day – the mud, no grass on the pitch in the second half of the season, heavy ball, heavy boots, relentless tackling from behind, training like lunatics, plastering each other like fury in practice matches."

He remains sad about the rapid decline of Arsenal's Double team. His own breaking point came when Mee relegated him to the reserves without notice. McIntock recalls: "I was so angry when Bertie dropped me at Birmingham [City] in 1973, only telling me just before the game, that I punched the wall beside his head, splintering the woodwork. Later, I asked Bertie for a testimonial, and the tears were bouncing off my blazer. I waited a week, and then he said no, I'd only been there nine-and-a-half years, I didn't qualify. Seven hundred top-flight games, and no testimonial. I moved to QPR, where there was more emphasis on skill – and we missed the Championship by one point."

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **A Ray of sunshine**

**Ray Kennedy's finest moment in an Arsenal shirt was heading home the winner at White Hart Lane in 1971 to clinch the first leg of the Double for Bertie Mee's side**

The Tottenham Hotspur players stood transfixed as the ball rolled towards the byline. A certain corner, they thought, until George Armstrong got there first to clip in a cross. Waiting in the penalty area, Arsenal's powerful young centre-forward climbed high to dispatch an emphatic header that thudded off the underside of the bar and into the net. The away end exploded in a roar very nearly matched by the thousands outside who couldn't get a ticket. By scoring the only goal at White Hart Lane on that famous May night in 1971, Ray Kennedy had entered Arsenal folklore, never to be erased, as the player who clinched the League Championship in the Club's first Double year.

Not bad going for a raw 19-year-old enjoying his first full season in the big time. By the time the final whistle blew against Liverpool in the FA Cup Final six days later, Kennedy had collected 26 goals on the way to forging a destructive partnership with another tough cookie from a northern mining family, the indomitable John Radford. The press hailed Kennedy as the new Tommy Lawton, the natural successor to Geoff Hurst for England. He looked all set, in fact, for a glittering career at the forefront of a side threatening to dominate English football for several years to come. For various reasons, that domination never materialised, and the player's own form became somewhat haphazard. Kennedy stayed at Highbury for another three years, banging in his fair share of goals, but never quite managing to recapture the form of that debut campaign when the world first opened its eyes to a prodigious talent.

Like any young player trying to make his way in the game, Kennedy had experienced good times and bad during the course of that season. The heavily built rookie had faced problems with stamina, not aided at all by his fluctuating weight. The mental demands, too, had taken their toll. Hardly surprising, then, that in the summer of 71, feeling pretty washed out, Ray turned down the chance to join the FA's tour of Australia, preferring instead to return home to Seaton Delaval, an old pit village just north of Newcastle where, around the back of the family terrace, he had first started kicking a ball against the coalhouse door.

And now this. His mum and dad, Veronica and Martin, couldn't have failed to detect the sweet smell of success. The smart clothes, the red Ford Capri; Kennedy waltzed up from London a fully fledged hero. Could it really have been only four years before that the teenager had returned home from Port Vale

feeling totally dejected? "I do not think you will ever make a professional football player and I suggest you go home." That one crushing sentence would be hard enough to take for any aspiring youngster, but when it comes from the great Sir Stanley Matthews, a national icon, it's enough to knock the stuffing out of the most resilient of souls.

The bad news hit him like a sledgehammer as he stood in the manager's office that day. In his letter of explanation to the young prospect's parents, Sir Stanley explained that Ray was "sluggish in his movements by his natural build". This wouldn't be the last time that the Geordie's athleticism came into question as, in the years that followed, a crippling malady gradually took hold. Nearly 20 years on from Matthews's rebuff, Kennedy was officially diagnosed as suffering from Parkinson's disease.

Reeling with shame and despair, the distraught teenager returned to Seaton Delaval, accepting a post as a trainee sugar boiler. Before too long he was in a local team, New Hartley Juniors, who provided the platform to rebuild his confidence. Word had steadily spread about the strong, swarthy figure making waves in the area when two Arsenal scouts, brothers Don and George Emerson, approached Ray's parents about a possible trial.

And so it was that in May 1968 Kennedy arrived at King's Cross, apprehensive and alone, having been offered an apprenticeship at the world-famous Club. A second chance beckoned. The early months went well and having held his own in several tough practice matches, Kennedy eventually signed professional forms on November 11. He moved into digs in North London to begin his Arsenal career in earnest.

After impressing for the youth team, Kennedy was soon making progress in the reserves. For a player radiating obvious promise, a chance in the first team wasn't far off. The big breakthrough came the following season, Kennedy making his full League debut on January 17, 1970, in the 3-0 home defeat to Chelsea. By the end of February he had scored his first goal. Two months on, a late header against Anderlecht in the first leg of the Fairs Cup Final would go on to be regarded as a defining moment. Three-nil down in Brussels with five minutes to go, Don Howe, Arsenal's enlightened coach, decided to throw on the 18-year-old. The move worked a treat. No sooner had the substitute taken up his position than he latched on to a long cross by Armstrong (not the first time this would happen) to majestically head home a goal that would prove a crucial lifeline.

Six days later, with Kennedy back on the bench, the team tore into their Belgian opponents straight from the start, easily winning 3-0. Grown men cried on Highbury's hallowed turf that night. It was viewed as a breakthrough, the

moment when the present generation could cast off the burden of past glories to make their own mark in history. Kennedy's precious goal in the Parc Astrid had made all the difference and helped set up the Club for what was to come. Despite this vital contribution, the striker was left out of the team for the first game of the following season (1970/1971) when a 2-2 draw at Everton set the ball rolling. Yet crucially, Charlie George, in bravely scoring Arsenal's first, broke his ankle in two places. The injury was to give Kennedy a chance to link up with Radford, a chance that he grabbed with both hands. The teenager wouldn't miss another game all season.

But if Kennedy went on to forge an admirable reputation that year for taking heavy punishment from cynical defenders without ever retaliating, he also became known for an acute sensitivity off the pitch when he'd snap back at anyone thought to be taking the mickey. Frank McLintock, Kennedy's captain and influential mentor, talks of several occasions when "the lad's head would go". One such example came on a regular mid-season trip to Bournemouth when the youngster turned on his skipper for no apparent reason. "We'd just come out of a nightclub," McLintock remembers. "Our eyes met and he just went for me. It was a good job the lads pulled us apart because I wouldn't have stood a chance!"

On the pitch it was a different matter. Kennedy rarely lost his rag. "You'd have to hit him with a tank before he'd ever fall over," McLintock says. "He had the strength of someone like Wayne Rooney only a bit taller. You'd crash into him and he'd shake a little bit then carry on." In September 1970, this resilience was tested to the full when the Lazio players meted out some terrible stick as Arsenal opened their defence of the Fairs Cup. During a spiteful 2-2 draw, the home side's niggly, underhand tactics had created a backdrop of simmering tension for a post-match reception in a Rome restaurant. On a very hot night, it didn't take long for trouble to flare. Stepping outside for a breath of fresh air, Ray found himself being set upon by a clutch of Italians. Hearing the commotion, team-mates steamed in to help and a mass brawl ensued as a jumble of flailing arms and legs spilled on to the street. With armed police quickly arriving on the scene, it could have turned very nasty indeed had Bertie Mee, Arsenal's horrified manager, not ushered all his players on to the team bus.

That was Kennedy – trouble seemed to follow him around. So did one or two phobias, including a deep-seated fear of enclosed spaces. When the team bus drove into the Dartford Tunnel one day, Ray was seen crouching on his seat, eyes closed, trembling with fear, asking his team-mates to tell him when they were out the other side. Similarly, he was on the London Underground once when the train made an emergency stop. In his autobiography, *Ray of Hope*, he

remembers the moment. "I was hot, sweaty and frightened. I couldn't stand the thought of having to get out and walk along the tunnel."

In hindsight, these phobias were probably all related to the developing Parkinson's disease. Other physical signs, however, including a loss of co-ordination, seemed to come on only intermittently. One very hot day, Ray told George Armstrong that his right hand felt stiff and clumsy. For a time, he couldn't do up his shirt buttons. This was a player who always finished training totally drenched in sweat, someone who would often return home exhausted, sleeping for several hours.

On the pitch, the team had struggled in the wake of its Double success and Ray's form was suffering, too. His weight crept up over 14 stone on an unhealthy diet of crisps, chocolate and beer as he became increasingly disillusioned with the game. Kennedy's travails increased. His marriage to Jenny, only in its third year, had been already bumpy for some time when they decided to separate.

By this time, stories had started to circulate about interest from other clubs – Sunderland, Newcastle and Aston Villa among them – but, as the 1973/1974 season drew to a close, Mee began secret negotiations with Liverpool's legendary manager, Bill Shankly. Oblivious to the talks, Ray went on holiday to Crete, returning to find Arsenal being strongly linked with Manchester United's Brian Kidd. Assuming that his older strike partner, John Radford, would be the one to make way should Kidd arrive, the 22-yearold was stunned when Mee broke the news. Liverpool had tabled an offer and Arsenal had accepted. Kennedy's time was up. He was surplus to requirements. The immediate reaction was that he didn't want to go. He didn't want to leave his beloved alma mater, where so much hard work and success had created a strong bond. But after thinking long and hard, Kennedy eventually saw sense. If the Club were willing to sell, he reasoned, it would be better all round if he made a fresh start. He travelled up to Liverpool to agree terms in a record £200,000 deal.

Looking back on his time at Highbury, Kennedy pinpointed Howe's departure as the main turning point. Once the inspirational coach had been allowed to leave for West Bromwich Albion straight after the Double year, the chemistry, Ray felt, was never quite the same. The transfer to Liverpool, meanwhile, had been completely overshadowed by the shock resignation of Shankly, revered on Merseyside for reviving an ailing club, whose parting shot had been to recruit the powerful Arsenal forward. In the fullness of time, it was to prove an inspired piece of business.

The original plan had been to replace John Toshack with Kennedy as Kevin Keegan's strike partner. Bob Paisley, Shankly's successor, persevered with the

idea for a season or so before eventually coming to the conclusion that it wasn't going to work. He suggested a deeper role, a slot on the left side of midfield. After practising in the reserves, Kennedy adapted to the switch with amazing aplomb and, for the next six glittering seasons, he made that position his own as the medals piled up.

Of all the trophies he won at Anfield (four League Championships and three European Cups among them), the first European victory in 1977 must rank as the most important, if only for its groundbreaking effect. Ray didn't have a particularly memorable game against Borussia Mönchengladbach in Rome, but he couldn't resist proudly showing off his medal to Sir Stanley Matthews afterwards. "Seen one of these before, Sir Stan?" he cheekily enquired. It is not known whether either bothered to mention a much more sombre meeting 10 years before.

Progress on the international front was always a struggle, rarely without its problems under both Don Revie and Ron Greenwood. Kennedy couldn't get his head around the long hours of travel and training with so little match action as reward at the end, especially as West Ham's Trevor Brooking usually got the nod as first choice ahead of him. Tired of the hassle, he eventually decided that enough was enough and took the sensational decision, after winning only 17 caps, to formally call it a day.

Back at Anfield, Ray's inseparable friendship with Jimmy Case had become something of a worry. The pair had always got themselves into scrapes off the pitch, whether it was harmless wind-ups or more serious fisticuffs, but a recent court case had brought matters to a head. Concerned for their good name, Liverpool sold Case to Brighton, leaving his close pal feeling rather alienated. Kennedy was never the same again. Soon after, he got sent off twice in quick succession – the first dismissals of his entire career. Paisley was reluctantly coming to the conclusion that the marriage had run its course and, in early 1982, he allowed Ray to leave Liverpool for Toshack's Swansea City.

Looking back on his time at Anfield, Kennedy said: "Sometimes I can't quite believe that an ordinary boy from Seaton Delaval could have won three European Cup medals. Recently my consistency, which has been the secret of my success here, has been slipping a bit and I knew something was not right."

Unfortunately the move to South Wales didn't go well from the start and after an increasingly unhappy time at the Vetch Field, when Toshack accused him of being overweight and unprofessional, he was released on a free transfer. Spells followed at lowly Hartlepool United and as a player-coach in Cyprus. Far from fit, feeling stiffer by the day, Kennedy was coming to realise that his playing career was drawing to a close. Planning for the future, he and his wife,



hoping that their turbulent relationship would settle down, moved back to the North-East to take over a run-down pub in Seaton Sluice.

Ray's general wellbeing, however, wasn't getting any better. Regulars at the Melton Constable put down the landlord's increasing lethargy and mood swings to coping with the comedown of life after football. But Kennedy suspected that there must be more to it than that, so drastic were the signs. Such suspicions were soon to be confirmed by Dr David Bates, a consultant neurologist at Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary. The patient was suffering from Parkinson's disease. Life can be cruel. Within six years of scaling the highest football peaks, Kennedy was left to fight this terrible affliction alone, in dreadful debt and soon to be divorced.

In response to their former servant's plight, Arsenal and Liverpool hosted a special testimonial match in 1991 to salute a man who had graced both clubs with distinction. Twenty thousand fans turned up at Highbury that day to show their appreciation for a formidable talent.

Two decades before, just up the road, an exciting young prospect full of hope and vitality had made an indelible mark with his title-winning goal. From then on, it had been a wildly eventful journey encompassing much joy and pain. Now here he was back where it began. The boy from Seaton Delaval – a gift to the game.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **Bob's iconic moments**

**The story of the career of Bob Wilson, fearless Doublewinning goalkeeper, can be told in pictures, including one set of three images that gave George Best nightmares...**

There are a million pictures of Bob Wilson. There is the one where he pounces at the feet of a stunned George Best, who's clearly unused to having his genius foiled by a valiant diving goalkeeper. There is his leap for joy at the other end of the pitch when Jon Sammels scores the third against Anderlecht in the second leg of the Fairs Cup Final at Highbury. There is the shy, innocent smile on his schoolmaster face among the boys of Rutherford School, Paddington, when the news broke that this 21-year-old amateur would make his debut for Arsenal. But above all the others, there's the one where a dimly seen figure is leaning slightly forward in a snowstorm, still standing loyally at his post, while all the other players from Arsenal and Sheffield Wednesday have retired to the warmth of the dressing room. This is Bob.

A man, a player, a pundit, a coach of immaculate standards, immense courage, unfailing decency and, especially in the early days, a touch of naivety that made him turn up for training at Arsenal on his first day in a college scarf and duffel coat. The senior professionals, Frank McLintock, Peter Simpson, Peter Storey and their ilk, must have wondered what on earth Billy Wright was thinking, signing this gauche young schoolteacher with curly blond hair and an old bug-eyed Austin Healey Sprite. They would find out. He missed not one single second of one single match of Arsenal's Double-winning season, 1970/1971. He was the ever-present cornerstone of that monumental success and he became a firm crowd favourite from the time he conclusively broke into the first team, in March 1968, until the moment he retired to his new job at the BBC in 1974. Even then, he came back, as goalkeeping coach, for 28 years. If courage was Wilson's speciality on the pitch, loyalty has been his trademark ever since. Arsenal are his club, and always have been, from the very first moment that he laid eyes on the magnificence that was Highbury in 1963.

"I was in my last year at Loughborough College, studying physical education and history. Bertie Mee, who I had met through the English Universities team, set up for me to meet Billy Wright, then the Arsenal manager. So I skipped off lectures, borrowed a mate's car and drove into this massive city that I'd only ever visited as a schoolboy or for football matches. Needless to say, I got totally lost in Islington. Then I turned down this little side street and was confronted by this amazing sight. I thought: 'Wow, that's not a football stadium, that's a

museum or something.' I stopped and parked – you could in those days, with no parking meters and no one to turn you away – and I just stood outside. History was my second subject at Loughborough, but this was living history. I remember walking up and down past the main entrance on Avenell Road, looking up at Arsenal Football Club with the flag flying proudly from the roof. All the other grounds I'd ever played in, even Old Trafford, paled. I thought: 'God, this is unbelievable'.

"Then I walked up to the entrance and went into the Marble Halls. I was initially shocked because they seemed so small. Having said that, I'd never been into a football club where they had marble – and the inlay of a cannon on the floor – and, facing you, a statue of a previous manager, in our case Herbert Chapman.

"I knew my history. I knew Chapman had created this institution. I went there knowing it wasn't just about being a football club. It was about winning trophies, setting standards, being an icon. I'd read about Chapman's innovations: numbers on shirts, 45-minute clock, under-floor heating, floodlighting. He even suggested that you needed two goalline judges to decide if the ball had gone over the line or not. Here we are in the 21st century and Roy Carroll [for Manchester United against Tottenham Hotspur] is three yards behind the line and the referee said 'no goal'.

"So when I had to stand in that hall and look at the famous Chapman bust, it was scary for me. Then Billy arrived. Billy Wright, the Arsenal manager, who ironically had been a hero at Wolverhampton Wanderers, the club I was currently playing for as an amateur. Here was a true idol of English football, captained his country, won 105 caps, so it was a big thing for me to be confronted by this shock of curly hair and famous beaming face. He showed me around and then took me downstairs and showed me the dressing room.

"When I did my legends tour of Highbury before it closed, people used to say: 'Oh, we thought the dressing room would be bigger.' But believe you me, when I went there in 1963 there was no dressing room comparable to the size and style of that one. They were at most half the size. To me it was like a ballroom.

"I had a complete look around but everything that Billy did that day was designed not to reveal the pitch to me until the last moment. It was the very last thing we did. So we walked the walk that I did many times. Out of the Arsenal dressing room, past the visitors' dressing room, turn right into the tunnel, past the Halfway House and into the open by the dugout. Billy said: 'Well, this is where you have to do it.' This was the moment of truth. "I can't remember what else he said then as he walked straight out to the centre circle. I just stood there. I

thought: 'This isn't a football ground. It's a cathedral'. I'd played at Old Trafford. I'd played at Villa Park, but I'd never played in a stadium quite like it. By the time Highbury closed it did look old, ancient even, but it was always a beautiful place.

"I think from that moment, from that day, I was decided. I was going to play for Arsenal. There was just one big problem ... Wolves."

A Bob Wilson would never exist in 21st century football. No Premiership football club would be in the market, fighting off rivals, for a graduate, trainee schoolteacher, of thin build, lovely disposition and playing for Wolves as an amateur. It doesn't happen any more.

"I was on Manchester United's books as a teenager. Nobby Stiles and I were the two they chose out of the England Schoolboys team in 1957. This was only months before the Munich air crash in 1958. I was living in Chesterfield, where I was born, and obviously I wanted to sign for the Busby Babes but my Dad wouldn't let me. Nobby signed, but my Dad said to me: 'Listen, you are going to be disappointed. I've told Matt Busby 'No'. Football isn't a proper job. I need you to get a proper job.' I was 15 and cried all the way home. But at least I was able to carry on playing with them, I met Duncan Edwards, and then came the crash. It had a massive impact on me. Oddly, though, my hero was a Manchester City player, the goalie Bert Trautmann, who I admired so much for his style and bravery.

"I was mixing playing with school work. Then my dad gave me a choice of going into either the Metropolitan Police or nursing, a profession that ran in the family. But that wasn't for me. I loved sport. All sport. I took part in all-England athletics, I was junior county cricket captain, I played county tennis for Derbyshire. So I went to Loughborough College, the leading sports university in the land. It was perfect. All my life I have felt as though somebody, somewhere was guiding me and this is another perfect example. During my three years at Loughborough I was on Wolves's books under Stan Cullis. I never made it as far as the first team, but I got as far as the reserves and the third team. I was a teenager and an amateur. That's what makes this story, because when Arsenal wanted to sign me, Wolves demanded a transfer fee even though they had never paid me a penny. We had a massive fight with Alan Hardaker, the toughliner who ran the Football League in those days. I disliked him intensely. He was virtually saying I had been paid illegally by Wolves which revoked my amateur status. This was rubbish. I went by bike to play for them. Sometimes I'd hitch by the side of the road. I can prove how naive I was at the time. I played at this time for Hinkley Athletic and after the match there was an envelope in my shoe. Instead of pocketing it, as obviously intended, I piped up in the dressing room:

‘Oh excuse me, someone’s left their money in my shoe.’ Hopeless.

"In the end Arsenal said they would sort out whether we went to court or not. They said the easiest way to do it was to pay for my registration. They did pay £7,500 for an amateur. It was the first time a fee had ever been paid for an amateur."

He was an Arsenal player. His dream move. But first he had to sign the forms and, at that point, another little problem reared its head. "We went into Bob Wall’s office, I remember, and I was worried. I had this family name which nobody knew. It was fine in many areas of work, one of my great uncles was the Lord Provost of Glasgow, and if I’d been an architect or a poet it would have been great. But in a footballer it’s not clever to be called ‘Primrose’, especially in a goalkeeper. So as I am standing there about to sign the forms I see it says: ‘RP Wilson’ but I signed it just ‘R Wilson’. They said, Bob Wall and Ken Friar this was: ‘You’ve not put your full name.’ I said: ‘I’m only Robert Wilson.’ They said: ‘No, no. We’ve got your bank details here and it’s definitely R.P. Wilson.’ I was 18 years of age and desperate. I said: ‘Look, you’ve got to understand that I’ve got a family name and it would be a huge embarrassment were it to come out.’ They said: ‘We have to do this officially, but don’t worry about it.’ I gave a little more ground. I said: ‘It’s a female name really.’ They said: ‘Don’t worry. We won’t laugh.’ So I said: ‘Well, it’s Primrose,’ and, of course, they both collapsed with laughter. There you go. My point proved."

Realistically, Robert Primrose Wilson was due a long apprenticeship at Highbury before he could possibly step up into the first team full of under-achieving and battle-hardened pros. It was no place for teachers in college scarves. "But no sooner had I got there than I found myself in the team." Jack Kelsey, Arsenal’s long-time goalkeeping hero, had retired in 1962. That left Arsenal with Jack McClelland, who won a handful of caps for Northern Ireland, a burly Scotsman called Ian McKechnie, two young lads, Ian Black and Tony Burns, and the amateur schoolteacher R. Wilson.

The truth is, at that time, none of them was any good. They suffered by comparison. They were following a true legend. By now Jack Kelsey was running the Arsenal shop, but in his heyday as a keeper he had done more than most to keep them in the First Division. "It was a hard act to follow. Jack McClelland started the season and got injured. McKechnie, who liked a pie, was deemed overweight and unfit. I’d gone on the pre-season tour, but back home my days were pretty full already. Up at 6am every day, on the Tube at 7.30am, at school by 8.30am, leave school at 4pm, take the Tube to Arsenal for training at 7.30pm, where I joined the sessions twice a week with local boys Charlie George and Pat Rice. Charlie, I could see straight away, was one of the finest young

players I'd ever seen in my life. He had a reputation for being a rascal, and that remains the case, but I love him dearly.

"Then there was this Irish boy who lived down the bottom of the street and looked to have no chance of ever making it as a professional footballer let alone lift the FA Cup in 1979 as Arsenal captain and stay on to become assistant manager. Pat Rice in those days was little, fairly rotund, very muscular and tough. He may not have been the greatest player in the world, but he came back every afternoon to practise his heading, his kicking, whatever. He, like me in a way, was a manufactured footballer as opposed to a natural one like Charlie.

"But first, let me take you back a little bit. I first turned up at the training ground in London Colney in a college scarf and duffel coat. Well, I soon learned that didn't go down very well in a group of very hardened professional lads. Their immediate thought was: 'Who is this loony?' Don Howe was very considerate. He came up and said: 'Hallo, nice to meet you,' but I knew the others were looking at me very doubtfully. The chances of me playing in the first team looked very remote indeed. But they were having a nightmare run. It was an Arsenal team that could score five and let in six. It was October 1963 and a call came through to the school. It was Bob Wall. He said: 'What are you doing tomorrow?' I said, cautiously: 'Why?' He said: 'Because you are going to play in the first team.' I was a teenage schoolteacher and an amateur. I've still got the programme where it lists all the players by their surname, but I appear with my initial 'R. Wilson'.

"The newspapers ran wild with the story. The Evening Standard came to Rutherford School and took photos in the playground of me and the kids. Can you imagine anything like this happening in the game today? But what Arsenal didn't know was that on the morning of the game I'd committed to referee a school match on Wormwood Scrubs. I couldn't let the school down. So I arranged with a friend that I would referee the first half, dash off to Highbury, and he would take over for the second half. And that is exactly what happened. I was on Wormwood Scrubs in the morning and on the pitch at Highbury when the game kicked off at three o'clock against Nottingham Forest.

"I was a fit guy, but I'd got so much nervous energy running through my system that day. Megs, my wife, came and it was a nightmare. I wasn't good enough. I didn't feel I belonged. In the dressing room, before the match, there was one man that really sensed my anxiety and that was the late Joe Baker. He came to me and said: 'Look, you're nervous, son. But don't worry. You'll be great.' He did everything he could that was positive. All the rest – I have to say – were a little bit edgy about me being there, which was not good for my confidence. Joe Baker singlehandedly got me through. I was second in line



behind captain George Eastham, going out. Obviously, you can imagine the curiosity. From then on, it was almost dream-like. It finished 4-2, but bang on half-time I made this incredible save to my left. It wasn't just a parry, it was a spectacular save, as I caught the ball in mid-air and held on to it. No gloves remember. The old heavy ball.

"Afterwards, the press had a field day. I was even likened to Lev Yashin, the former Soviet goalkeeper, one of the greatest of all time, known as the Black Panther. That may have been going slightly over the top, but that save was one of the most memorable of my career. Then a terrible thing happened. Ten minutes from the end, I got cramp. Not from physical exhaustion, but from the continuing buzz of nervous energy. Bertie Mee, then the physio, came on and said: 'Come on, you've done brilliantly. Keep going.' I just about managed to limp along until the final whistle. Then everyone went mad. We, Megs and I, drove back to Chesterfield that night to visit mum and dad. I felt exhausted but contented. It was a massive, massive day for me.

"I think I played for about eight straight games in the first team, but obviously I still had to do my teaching. Understandably, I was dropped to the reserves and Arsenal bought another goalkeeper, Jim Furnell, understudy to Tommy Lawrence at Liverpool. I did play in a game against Sheffield Wednesday at Christmas that was never registered because a snow storm arrived as we kicked off for the second half and the referee called off the game. The trouble is, I was still in goal, unable to see a thing. 'Mate, they've all left,' someone shouted in the crowd, for which I was truly grateful."

R. Wilson, in his youth, was struggling to come to terms with the hard face of English First Division football. But he was getting better. The duffel coat had gone, but then one day he met an interesting little character in the players' tea room, halfway down the Arsenal tunnel, known as 'Halfway House'. "It was after the match and I was in there having a cup of tea while the rest of the lads were getting changed. I started talking to this little man who had a really lived-in face. He said: 'I know you, you're Bob Wilson.' We chatted for about 10 minutes, about how he had always lived in Islington and always supported the Arsenal, and then he said he was off.

"Frank McLintock was standing by the door. He said: 'You keep nice company, Willow.'

'What do you mean?' I asked. 'That man's Frankie Fraser.' 'Who's Frankie Fraser?' I asked, my naivety continuing. 'He's a hit man for the gangsters, the Richardsons.' 'What do you mean?' 'He shoots people.' 'Shoots people, what do you mean?' 'Bang, bang. You're dead,' said Frank in exasperation. Of course, I looked at the little man with my mouth open after that. Funnily enough, he was

put away shortly afterwards for 25 years, but it certainly goes to show how much I had to learn."

He did learn. He replaced Jim Furnell after the former Liverpool player was, perhaps unfairly, blamed for the goal by Terry Cooper that won the 1968 League Cup Final for Leeds United. He grasped his chance with trademark determination. For a few years, he was the corner stone of a parsimonious defence, marshalled by his old protection man, McLintock. There have been many "greatest moments" at Highbury. "My greatest save was obviously the one diving at the feet of Georgie Best at the start of our Double season. This was the great Manchester United team. They'd been European Champions. Denis Law was playing, Bobby Charlton, George. Nobby was in there, my old team-mate. Anyway, it was just before half-time and George was through. Everybody knows that nine times out of 10 George would have scored, being one of the greatest wingers the game has ever seen. "But this time, he ran towards me, dropped his shoulder which should have unbalanced me, but for some reason I kept my head and then chose to dive the way he showed to go. While he was thinking about placing the ball in the net, I managed to nick it with my left hand. And then I did an athletic bounce back on to my feet. He just stood there, looking at me, with an expression that said: 'What the...'. In his autobiography, the one he wrote with Michael Parkinson, George said it remained one of his all-time nightmares. 'How did Bob Wilson get that ball?'. "

"But, for me, the greatest occasion at Highbury was definitely Fairs Cup night against the Belgian champions, Anderlecht, in 1970 when we overcame 17 barren years to win a trophy again. I really think the origins of that, and the Double a year later, came out of our League Cup final defeat against Swindon Town, of the Third Division. Because everyone wrote us off. You can either go down or you can fight back. We fought back. In the semi-finals of the tournament we beat a young Ajax. We whacked them well and truly, but on the actual night of the final at Highbury we were trying to come back from a 1-3 first-leg deficit. I still think that most Arsenal fans who were there that night would say it was the most exciting match there's ever been at the stadium. People say that the 5-4 defeat by Manchester United five days before the Munich air crash was the greatest game, but that may be because of its tragic relevance to history.

"For pure adrenaline, the Fairs Cup beats everything. We'd left the pitch in Belgium so deflated. Ray Kennedy has scored with a late header. Frank was the hardest hit afterwards. He came off effing and blinding and cussing. Then he went in the showers and came out again in a completely different frame of mind. He was Braveheart, screaming and yelling: 'We will slaughter them!'. Well, we

didn't slaughter them, but it was really and truly an amazing night. For me, most memorable was the Anderlecht shot that slapped into the post when the score was 1-0 to us. They had a fabulous player called Jan Mulder, who people said was better than Johan Cruyff at the time. He led the line brilliantly and was hugely dangerous. When they hit the post – Mulder made the chance – I thought: 'Wow, that was lucky,' then almost immediately we got a second goal. In the end, I didn't have a lot of saves to make, but the tension was almost unbearable. There were 60,000 in Highbury that night and at the end everyone went mad.

"The season after winning the Fairs Cup came the Double, the greatest season of my entire career. I played every minute of every game. George Armstrong nearly matched the feat, but he got subbed, late on, in one game, I think. I was Arsenal's Player of the Year. It was like a dream come true. If I look back at myself in any pictures, I can see the change in me. At first, I was a lanky, gawky, if fit-looking, amateur. From 1969 onwards, there's a totally different animal. After a save, you'd see me laugh with the opposition, exuding a confidence that was never, ever there before. The penny had finally dropped that I could play."

He still had sweet vestiges of innocence about him. After the Fairs Cup victory, he thinks he probably went for a Chinese meal with Megs and the family because he could never fall asleep after an evening match – let alone that momentous occasion – until three in the morning. After Arsenal had won the Championship a year later, he went with everyone else to their favourite pub in Southgate. "But me being me, I appeared, then slid out of the back door. I wasn't a drinker. I had family at home." He spent a decade at the Club as a player in total, winning three major honours and two Scotland caps. But by the 1973/1974 season, he had suffered a career-threatening knee injury and, rarely for the time, the BBC had come to him and offered him a job fronting a Saturday lunchtime football programme that would become *Football Focus*.

"I went to see Bertie. I said: 'Look, I've had this offer...' I never wanted to play for anybody else. Oh, never, never, ever. I never left Arsenal from the time I joined them, first as a player and then as goalkeeping coach. They were my club from the moment I fell in love on what I call 'Cathedral Day'. Bertie's reply was: 'You'll not get a testimonial.' I'd joined in 1963, was leaving in 1974 and you were supposed to get a testimonial game when you'd served a club for 10 years. I was due one. I was on a basic salary of £130 a week plus bonuses and I was about to take a massive pay cut to go to the BBC. But Bertie was adamant. As I was leaving to take up a job, I had to forego the testimonial.

"Meanwhile, other things were going on. Bobby Campbell had been appointed as Arsenal's coach from Queens Park Rangers and one of the first

things he wanted to do was bring in his own personnel, one of them being Phil Parkes, the goalie. This had a big impact on me. I never wanted to be seen to be dropped. From the moment I got in the side in 1968 I'd played in every match I was available to play in. The ending with Arsenal threatened to break my heart. But Phil Parkes didn't come in the end and I chose to go to the BBC.

"First I had to play my last game ever for Arsenal at Highbury against QPR. We hadn't had a brilliant season. Nothing was resting on the result for either side. Yet 40,000 people turned up that day. That was for me. It wasn't quite the testimonial I had been hoping for – we earned a £2 draw bonus for a score of 2-2 – but it was massively emotional. My little boy, John, went with Megs and cried throughout the game. My other two children, Anna and Robert, were at home, too young to be involved.

"The occasion was memorable in many ways. Alan Ball broke his leg and I was presented with a cannon which got stolen three months later. The burglars took my Cup Final medals and everything. We never found them, but I was allowed by the FA to buy myself a new Cup winner's medal for £390 or something. I've still got the bill upstairs somewhere because I couldn't believe they would be so mean as to make me buy the replacement myself. The cannon I missed, but I had the equivalent on my last day at the Club as a goalkeeping coach having worked with goalies for nearly 30 years, including my friend David Seaman. They gave me a beautiful silver tray decorated with a cannon.

"But you know the main thing I should tell you is that although I let in two goals on my last game at Highbury, I can state categorically that neither of them was my fault."

**Sue Mott**

**In memory of Anna**

**Bob Wilson describes how he and his wife Megs set up the Willow Foundation, Arsenal's official charity for the 2006/2007 season**

My wife Megs and I started up the Willow Foundation in 1999 as a lasting memorial to our daughter, Anna, who died of cancer aged 31. The inspiration for the charity came from Anna herself who encouraged us to use what we had learnt from her illness to create positive experiences for others living with similar life-threatening conditions.

We launched the Willow Foundation with an initial aim to provide special days for those living in north east Hertfordshire with serious illnesses such as cancer, motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis and organ failure. However, such was the demand for the charity's service that within six years it had achieved national status. From organising and funding 17 special days in its first year from a spare bedroom in our home, the Foundation has today grown into a charity with 26 staff, offices in Old Hatfield and a demand for its service of in excess of 1,000 applications per year.

Although we have stepped back from day-to-day charity operations, we remain on the board of trustees (Megs is chair) and are closely involved with the many fundraising initiatives that will ensure the Foundation's long-term future. We are also kept informed of all special days and send our own personal messages to each recipient.

Every special day is individually tailored and organised to meet the recipient's requirements. Whether the wish is for a family day out, tickets to a sporting or musical event or a weekend away, the Foundation takes care of every element and cost of the special day – from the transport arrangements and accommodation to the activity/tickets and meals. Wherever possible the charity would hope to exceed everyone's expectations to create a day that is truly memorable for all involved.

And it works. The response from recipients, their families and those medical professionals involved in their care and treatment is overwhelmingly positive: "The anticipation of the event kept me alive and focused through some very tough times this year and now, as I wait for the next prognosis, I just think about our 'special day' to lose myself in happiness." – Louise attended the Arsenal v Zagreb match at Emirates Stadium in August 2006.

"My brother's illness is degenerative, but just the mention of Chelsea brings a smile to his face. He was very excited about the prospect of going to watch

them and it was great for me to be with him on the day. I have watched him go through so much over the past year and this day was all the more special for that, so a heartfelt thank you to everyone for making it possible." – Andy, brother of Stuart, who attended Chelsea v Manchester United in April 2006

"The lift these days give to these youngsters can't be equalled with any medicine." – Angie, Specialist Liaison Sister, whose patient met Ainsley Harriott during filming for the BBC series *Ready Steady Cook*.

Focusing our efforts on ensuring the Foundation can continue to provide special day experiences such as these is now our main concern. Fundraising initiatives are ongoing throughout the year and include charity events (eg balls, golf days and quiz nights) as well as developing corporate associations. In 2006 the Foundation was adopted as Arsenal FC's charity of the season for 2006/2007 – a tremendous honour for the charity and one that provided the opportunity to raise much-needed funds as well as significantly raise its profile across the UK.

The Foundation is understandably eager to maximise its association with the Club and reach out to players, members, management, employees and fans. Ultimately the Foundation's association with Arsenal will allow it to reach out to more seriously ill young adults throughout the UK and support them with special days. For some it will be their last chance to fulfil a dream. For others it will be opportunity to bring some normality back into their lives. But for all, the memories of their day will stay forever.

## PROFILE



# **A top coach, and Howe**

**Don Howe's partnership with Bertie Mee was crucial to Arsenal's success in the early 1970s, with the manager leaving his coach to take charge on the training ground**

Don Howe, now retired, is an earnest man: as accomplished right-back for West Bromwich Albion and England from 1952-1964, as coach and as manager. His bookshelves, when his coaching career was developing, were lined with volumes on professionalism, on maximising his talents with titles such as *How to Succeed in Business*, *Public Speaking* and the like. It has always been rewarding to talk with someone who, throughout his time in the game, has been so consistently objective, self-analytical and, not always characteristic of football, truthful. He gained 23 caps with England and was at his peak during the time of the 1958 World Cup, when England's prospects had been sadly lessened by the death of three top players from Manchester United – Roger Byrne, Duncan Edwards and Tommy Taylor. By the 1962 World Cup in Chile, Howe had lost his place to Jimmy Armfield, of Blackpool. He continued at club level, moving to Arsenal in 1964, but his playing career ended after he broke his leg in March 1966.

"I went to watch England in the 1966 World Cup Final at Wembley on a walking stick, still trying to get fit again," Howe recalls. "At 31, I was getting on as a player. On the recommendation of Dr Alan Bass, the doctor with Arsenal and England, I'd had a new form of operation, used by competitive skiers, where they put a plate in your tibia instead of encasing you in plaster of Paris. By the end of the year, Bertie Mee and I realised I wouldn't play again. Dave Sexton was coaching the first team, and Bertie asked me if I'd fancy handling the reserves. When Dave left for Chelsea in 1967, Bertie asked me to step up to the first team. I said I was inexperienced, but I'd have a go, given my experience of playing at international level."

Howe was sympathetic towards the fate of Billy Wright and his dismissal in 1966. "To be honest, I think we, the players, let him down. Given the calibre he'd got – Jim Furnell in goal, Ian Ure at centre-back, George Eastham in midfield, Joe Baker and Alan Skirton up front – we were inconsistent. Yes, occasionally we looked good, but the next week we'd be down. Going out in the FA Cup to Peterborough United was an example. There were a number of so-called stars, but for one reason or another, they didn't knit. I'd played a lot with Bill. When we were with England, he from Wolverhampton Wanderers, me from West Brom, we'd travel down to London together, and became friends. He was a great bloke, huge enthusiasm for the game, really approachable, never conscious

of being a 'big' player. It was in Walter's [Winterbottom, England's manager and FA director of coaching] mind that Bill would become a top coach. I used to go with Bobby Robson, who was with us at West Brom as an inside-forward, to summer courses, and Walter would be using Bill to give talks. He spoke like a footballer, not a theorist. Then, all of a sudden, Bill gets the Arsenal job, and then he buys me. He was not much different as manager; it was his nature to be friendly, but the responsibility of managing a club like Arsenal was difficult for him. He brought in Les Shannon, from Burnley, as coach, but they couldn't get results. You can have all the ideas, but no results, and then you pay for it and go."

If Howe was sorry for Wright, he would soon have reason to be grateful to Bertie Mee for promotion. "We all knew Bertie. He was with us all day, every day, and for some of us his appointment was not a surprise. He was the best physio in the game, and the Club had done this before, with Tom Whittaker and then George Swindin – putting people in the top seat who knew how the Club looked at things, and wanting continuity. When it came to discipline, Bertie didn't mess about, an element Billy and Les had found difficult. There were aspects that needed sorting out, clamping down on, and I guess the boardroom knew this."

Howe had some insight into the thinking within the boardroom. When the team had been on tour in South Africa in the summer of 1964, Peter Hill-Wood, the chairman's son, had been in charge. Howe was a golfer, and would take part in a four-ball in company with Hill-Wood, and they became friendly. Yet even without this informal association, Howe approved of the hard line that would be taken by Mee. "The difference was immediate. He told the players precisely what he wanted, on discipline, punctuality and dress, which was to be smart casual mid-week and blazer, collar and tie on Saturdays. Did I hold the strings as coach on the field? We were two together, both doing what we were good at. By the time I took over, we began to move into a phase of adapting players positionally, tactically. George Graham moved from attack to midfield, Frank McLintock and Peter Simpson from midfield to centre-back. Geordie Armstrong moved around, initially [used as] just a runner, but I realised with his strength to run all day, he could become a creator, especially as he was two-footed for crossing the ball. I would say that to an extent Armstrong made Radford and Kennedy, though Radford was already a good player. You could rely on him to deliver and he was more than just a centre-forward who was good in the air."

So how did Howe, together with Mee, turn a collection of good players into a unit, in the way that Wright had failed? In analysing the fabric of Arsenal's developing team, Howe points to the many player meetings, in the dressing room

and staff room, that bound the team together, similar to the principle that had existed in Chapman's time. Only now, a key element was their collective will to be able to remove the pictures on the wall from the past, of Bastin and James, Buchan and Hapgood, Mercer and Kelsey, which for more than a decade had been a reminder of current failure. "We didn't know how big the breakthrough [of 1970] would be. And when we looked at the photos on the walls, Bertie used to remind the players that they themselves had to earn the right to take them down. The team that did the Double in 1971 was born out of failure. We twice got to the League Cup final, against Leeds United in 1968 and Swindon Town in 1969, only to lose both times. Those defeats were a real kick up the backside. A lot of lesser teams would have just broken up, but for us those matches were a kind of breakthrough, and the next year we went on to win the Fairs Cup against Anderlecht, partially thanks to young Ray Kennedy coming into the team. Besides which we dealt well with Jan Mulder, Anderlecht's best player."

What was Howe's gift to the unification in the dressing room? In his way, he could be as stern as Mee, and far more emotional. There were moments in post-match debriefings when the situation could reach screaming pitch, yet in an instant return to equilibrium and friendship. "Tactically, I'd started early on to do things differently, particularly with help from Bob McNab, who joined us from Huddersfield Town where they knew how to defend. Dave Sexton had liked man-for-man marking, but I was not too happy with this and in the summer of 1969, at the German training camp at Hennef, I decided to switch to zonal marking."

Where, then, were the key turning points in performance? "You judge yourself by measurement against certain other teams, when you could go on the field and know you have a decent chance of a draw or even victory against the likes of Leeds or Liverpool. When you're coaching new ideas, the next match, and the next, are so vital. If you lose, the players become anti, and start asking was it worth changing, making excuses. If you win, and win again, in the players' minds you're the greatest coach living."

Howe's value to Mee was his sensitivity to the weak link on the field, knowing which player – and why the team – was stuttering. "You have to know that, it's no different from any car engine, which is only as good as its weakest point." Yet what surprised Howe was the depth of character existing in a side that would move on to achieve the Double. "We didn't realise the resolve they had. They were stronger than we thought they were; they were winners."

Given the rise to fame in 1971, why did Arsenal's fortunes thereafter so rapidly go downhill? "After the celebrations, everyone was shooting off on holiday, and suddenly I got offered the job at West Brom. I felt that it was time

for me to have a go, to be the top man. Bertie was away, so I discussed it with Bob Wall, the general secretary, and told him I had to give Albion an answer. So I just went. With hindsight, I realise I left when I should have stayed and then, perversely, years later when taking over from Terry Neill as manager, I stayed when I should have left. I believe if I'd stayed we could have won the League again. The team wanted to listen to me. When I took over from Terry in 1982, and we'd been in three Cup Finals, I was still saying the same things, and I realised the squad needed somebody new. I should have gone. Coaches can go on too long, and once players get used to you, you're no big deal, no longer inspiring." Howe is conscious that he could be contradicting himself. Was there not an argument for staying in 1982, if there was in 1971? "It's the same as with Tiger Woods changing his coach; you get it in all sports: a new approach is needed to get the players interested and motivated. Look at Clive Woodward in rugby. After six years with a team as coach you're not fresh, whether you like it or not. The players start to moan 'he's always on about this' and get bored."

So, was Howe essentially a coach and not a manager, a born No 2 as the saying goes? "We all tend to get put in boxes, so people say 'Don Howe's a coach, and he did OK with England, didn't he, in 1982'. I was lucky enough to work with Bertie, who let me do my job out on the pitch, which is where I want to be, but does that make me exclusively a coach and not a manager? Because I didn't get results, first at West Bromwich and then later back at Highbury, does that make me not a manager? When I resigned in March 1986, Arsenal were in fifth place in the table. We drew a Cup tie at Luton Town for a second replay. There was a toss for venue and before the game was over David Pleat, Luton's manager, appears on the touchline shouting to his players: 'We're at home'. If the toss had taken place in the boardroom, why had I not been informed? By the weekend game at Coventry, I'd resigned on principle."

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **The King of Highbury**

**The fans loved him, his manager put up with him, just about. Right up to the move to Emirates Stadium, Charlie George the entertainer was conducting tours of his beloved ground**

Thousands of pilgrims have toured Highbury over the years. In the last days of the stadium, before the removal of Arsenal Football Club round the corner to Emirates Stadium, the demand was more frenetic than ever. People yearning to pay their respects, say goodbye, walk into history, turned up at the Marble Halls in fevered anticipation. If you were lucky, an Arsenal "legend" would be your tour guide. If you hit the jackpot, that legend would be Charlie George.

For those unacquainted with the legend, you could find a description of Charlie on a plaque in the Arsenal museum that contained the highlights of his Highbury career. "Flamboyant Charlie George was the man who clinched the Double for Arsenal with this thrilling goal in the 1971 FA Cup Final. Islington-born, George was the local boy made good who brought pace, flair and excitement to the Arsenal midfield and attack. He finally left the Gunners for Derby County where he continued to delight the fans – and where he was awarded an England cap." The cap is there too, with its three lions motif and a dangling silver tassel. It didn't look as though Charlie had worn it. Not quite his style somehow.

"This is our Cocktail Lounge," says a smartly dressed man with a mischievous expression and utter confidence in his subject. He does not bear immediate resemblance to the longhaired maverick pictured in the museum. The hairline has receded like lowtide at Margate and spectacles perch on his nose. But the chat, interlaced with affection, profanity and barefaced cheek, is pure Charlie. This is the North Bank's darling all right, the boy who hopped over the moat, on to the pitch and into the hearts of the supporters for all time.

You are about to go on tour with a legend.

"So here is where people that sit in our Directors' Box come before the game. Obviously, the bar is shut because we don't drink any more. Not like in my day, when we used to have a drink and it used to go on for two or three days. But even I drink water now. With a dash of vodka. Only joking, kids. If you like to congregate by those cabinets outside, I will come and join you and away we'll go."

## **Arsenal Trophy Cabinet**



"I normally say as you're coming out: 'You're moving as slow as our back four', but they've quickened up the last couple of games so it would be a bit rude to say that, wouldn't it?"

"I've been coming to Arsenal for 50 years now. I don't know everything that's in every cabinet but those I do, I'll tell you about. First I'd like to refer to the bust of our old chairman, Denis Hill-Wood. He was a fantastic chairman, Denis. One of the old school and I'm sure you're all aware that his son Peter is our chairman now; he's an equally nice chap. I think the reason Denis and I got on so well is we were both Old Etonians and we seemed to have quite a lot in common." (Titters). "Please don't be frightened to laugh. These are the jokes, folks."

"In the first cabinet we have the old Littlewoods Cup. I'm sure the youngsters don't remember that. Arsenal beat Liverpool in the final in 1987. It's a funny thing. All Charlies score winners against Liverpool at Wembley, don't they?" [He means himself in that 1971 FA Cup Final and his namesake, Charlie Nicholas, who scored the winner in 1987.]

"There's a replica of the FA Cup. What normally happens at our football club, we have the replica [Arsenal were the holders at the time] on show for every home game, so the opposing directors can actually have a look at it. Because you've got to realise a lot of them have never seen it. The real Cup, that's with the Football Association. There's a guy from the FA, you know, who travels about 50-60,000 miles a year with the FA Cup going to schools and functions. I've met him because I once had my photo taken for the Mirror with the Cup and former Liverpool captain, Tommy Smith. Then the guy packed the Cup in the box and took it back to London. Somebody said to me: 'He sleeps more with the Cup than he does with his wife'. I said: 'I've not seen his wife, so I can't really comment.'

"This piece of glassware was made in honour of Arsenal's fantastic unbeaten run of 49 games from 2003/2004. Now, as I said, I've been coming to Highbury for 50 years. I never saw the great side in the 1930s that my father always used to tell me about. I played in some great sides myself. But in my opinion, the team that played in the unbeaten run produced the best football I've ever seen at Arsenal. I've never seen football like it. In that 15, 16-month period it was absolutely fantastic and great credit to the manager and the players. It would have been a lot better if it had been 50 against the Mancs wouldn't it? Eh? If I'd got my hands on the referee that day, I'd have strangled him. I don't like referees anyway." [He didn't either. He was a one-man rebellion against authority in all its guises, from school teachers to football managers such as Arsenal's Bertie

Mee, culminating in his sale to Derby County in 1975.]

"How many of you remember 1972 when we played Ajax of Amsterdam in the European Cup. We got beat in the first leg 2-1 in Holland. In the return leg we got beat 1-0 by an own goal. Does anyone know who scored it?"

"George Graham."

"Absolutely correct. What a magnificent goal. I think Pete Kaiser crossed it and George, who was brilliant in the air, tucked it right in the top corner of the North Bank goal.

"But the good thing about playing Ajax was that I met one of the greatest players of all time. Johan Cruyff. He was up there with Pele, Maradona, Eusebio. Fantastic football player. I actually swapped shirts with him that night. I wasn't usually into all that, but I regarded him as such a great player I thought: 'I've got to get his shirt'. No. 14 it was, like the one brought to life by our own great player, Thierry Henry.

"I said to a friend of mine who knows Johan: 'Does he still use my shirt?' He said: 'He uses it all the time,' I said: 'Fantastic, what for?' He said: 'He cleans his car with it.'

"And this is not the BBC Greyhound Racing Trophy by the way, although it could be. The way Thierry Henry runs, I think he's faster than half the dogs I've backed, believe me. It is actually a trophy the Club received in honour of Arsène Wenger's first Double in 1998.

"Another piece of glass in the corner. How many of you remember playing Sheffield Wednesday three times in 1993 at Wembley. The first one, the League Cup, was the worst cup final I've ever seen. Who scored the winner in the third, the FA Cup Final replay? That's right, centre-half Andy Linighan. A header from a corner. There's a rarity at Arsenal these days, eh?"

"In my opinion, one of the greatest European evenings we've ever had was when we beat Inter Milan in the San Siro. After losing 3-0 to Inter in the home leg – Thierry missed a pen, Jens Lehmann slung one in, the Italians give us a rub down a little bit – we went to the San Siro for the return leg. Thierry and the boys were on fire that night. We won 5-1. I think we could have scored eight. This plate commemorates that great event.

"And what about the old leather footballs? Remember them? Here's one. One of our old players, Alf Kirchen, gave it to us from an England game in the 1930s when we beat Norway 6-0. I came in on the back end of leather footballs many years ago. Believe me, when it was wet and very muddy, they were very difficult to kick, never mind head. Speaking to one of our old centre-halves, Leslie Compton – a fantastic football player and nice, nice man – I said: 'Years ago all the centre-forwards and centre-halves had scars above their eyes. Why's that?'"

He said: 'I'll tell you. When the lace was in, and the ball was wet and you headed it wrong from a cross, it used to split your eyes open.' So they were real tough guys. That would never happen in our team now. We don't head the ball any more. But I don't want to be controversial. [Grin.]

"And this photograph probably represents the greatest international achievement the Club has ever known. We actually provided seven players for England. We also provided the pitch and the trainer. That was in 1934. We beat Italy 3-2. Fantastic achievement. George Male, the old full-back in the picture, actually scouted me for this football club. I hope I repaid him a little bit.

"I don't think Arsenal will supply seven players for England again. I used to think France, but even the number of Frenchmen in the team is going down now.

"Do have a read of a letter on the wall that our chairman received a few years ago. True story, I'm telling you now. Many years ago we had a visit from a student from Poland. While he was over here studying, for a bit of extra cash, he ended up working in the Gunners pub. He became a big Arsenal fan and now he's president of Poland. Twelve months ago when he was over on a state visit, he rang up the Club and asked if we could show him round the football stadium. We agreed and they asked me to take him all round. I actually got him on the pitch, which is a miracle. The groundsman doesn't even like the players on the pitch.

"While he was out there with about 30 of his entourage, I actually slung him a ball and he started having a few shots at goal. He had had about five shots when I went over to him and said: 'The best thing you ever done, son, was take up politics'.

"Take some pictures and whenever you're ready we'll go outside to see how the elite watch football. And cheer up."

## **Directors' Box**

"Take a seat everybody, please. I'll just explain what happens when we leave Highbury. The North and the South Bank will be knocked down immediately and there will be flats and houses built. The East and West stands will stay exactly as they are, but they'll be converted into penthouses and apartments. By doing that we'll generate about £150 million.

"When I was a youngster and I first used to come and stand on the terraces with the big crash barriers – do you remember the letters of the alphabet going round the corner for the half-times? – the highlight of the day used to be the police band going round, with the leader slinging the baton up in the air. When

anyone scored at Highbury, the crowd would sway all over the place and I would end up about 20 yards away from whoever I came with.

"As I got older, I started walking round to the West Stand. There were no seats in those days. Believe me, some games you could have had a five-a-side in there, there was so much space. Then I started standing on the North Bank with about 15 or 20 of my friends.

"And then just after I turned 11 – I was very fortunate – I started to come and train at Arsenal with all the other local lads on a Monday and Thursday evening. In the 1970s Bob Wilson used to travel all the way down from Loughborough College and train with us lads as well. Not only was he a great goalkeeper, he was also the bravest goalie I've ever played with.

"After standing on the terraces another four years, I joined Arsenal in 1966. That was the year England won the World Cup. At the time a guy called Billy Wright was the manager. He was a fantastic football player – he played 105 times for England – but as a manager he didn't seem to work out. I was actually Billy's last signing. I was here two weeks and he got the sack. I thought: 'Well it can't be my fault, they haven't seen me play yet.'

"The Club was having a tough time. In the 1965/1966 season, we played Leeds United on a Thursday night, in the penultimate game of the season. It was pouring with rain. Joe Baker and George Eastham, our two international players, had got dropped. Ian Ure, the big centre-half, remember him, played centre-forward. We got beat 3-0. Does anyone know what the crowd was that night? [Silence]

"I'll tell you. 3,900.

"Have a look in the history books. It will probably tell you there was 4,500, but I counted every one that night and it was 3,900. So the board of directors decided to have a change. Bertie Mee the physio took over. I didn't quite get on with him, but he did quite a good job for the Club.

"So after standing on the terraces for 10 years, I'm actually playing with these guys. The biggest buzz you'll ever get in your life was hearing 20,000 people on the North Bank chanting your name out. Absolutely fantastic feeling."

## **Press Interview Room**

"This is our press room, everybody, where the manager speaks to the press after the game. Down the far end is a bar which I keep saying should be taken out because I wouldn't like them to be a little bit inebriated when they write about Arsenal. But then I'm biased.

"This is where we used to sign players. But the Arsenal players don't ever come to the stadium any more. The only time they come is to actually play a game. Probably the greatest player signing we ever made in here, in my opinion, is Dennis Bergkamp 11 years ago. What a fantastic player. Just goes to show how times have changed. When I signed for Southampton, I signed in a King's Cross cafeteria on a Friday night. Lee Dixon – one of our greatest back-four players – he signed in the back of George Graham's car in a service station on the M1. It was a little bit cloak-and-dagger in those days.

"But who would you say is the best signing we've ever made? No, not me. I'll tell you who. Arsène Wenger. It was the best piece of business ever when David Dein, the vice-chairman, signed Arsène to be manager of Arsenal Football Club. He has been absolutely amazing over the last 10 years. We never finished out of the top two until this last season at Highbury, but it's been great how the youngsters have come in. All in all, I think we've been spoiled over the last 10 years.

"Some of the players our manager has bought for this Club, some of the football we've been playing, is amazing, outstanding. I've never seen anything like it and let's hope it can continue. I'm pretty sure we won't have to win the European Cup to qualify for Europe. I'm convinced we'll finish in fourth place." [He was dead right.]

"The first thing Arsène Wenger realised was that we had never owned our own training ground. We've always had a great affiliation with London University and the pitches at London Colney are as good as that one out there. But Arsène just felt that a club of our stature should have its own training ground. So he spoke to the board and 300 metres up the road in London Colney we bought a plot of land where we now have 10 football pitches.

"When I was a player there, we used to have a magnificent canteen. After training you'd have a bit of steak and kidney pie and chips, apple pie and custard. Those days are finished. We have a chef that looks after the players now, bit of fish, bit of chicken.

"And they also like banoffee pie. I never heard of banoffee pie. As a kid, a bit of jam roly-poly and you were over the moon, weren't you?

"As you go down the stairs there's a great picture on the wall, the 1893/1894 Woolwich Arsenal team. They were the instigators of Arsenal Football Club. They put the first brick in the wall for the likes of me and these guys today and should always be remembered.

"Have a look at their attire, their boots, their shin pads, even the size of the ball. Don't forget these guys probably went to work before they played and work after they played. They were real tough guys in the old days. A lot of people say

to me: 'Could they have played in today's game – could I play in today's game?' I turn round and say I've had the pleasure of watching many great players at Arsenal Football Club: the great Ted Drake, the brilliant Liam Brady, I've seen Sir Stanley Matthews and Tom Finney play at this magnificent stadium. In my opinion, if they had the same diets and same fitness coaches as these guys today, they would be able to play now. I think if you can play football, you can always play football.

"This is where our great manager, Arsène Wenger, sits and this is where Dennis Bergkamp sat when he signed for the Club. If you want to come up and take pictures, you're quite welcome and then we'll go down to the dressing room and I'll have a chat with you down there."

## **The Dressing Room**

"This side of the stadium was built in 1935/1936. It's absolutely amazing really. The first thing you notice when you come in here is the heat. Comes up through the under-floor heating. You can imagine playing for Arsenal in the 1930s. You must have felt very special. I'm not sure how many people had heating in their own homes in the 1930s ... I've got none in mine now.

"The manager at the time was George Allison, and the first thing he did when he came in this dressing room was hang the goalkeeper's jersey on that hook by the door. And it's been that way for the last 70 years. We never line up in the dressing room any other way. We're very much into tradition at Arsenal. We don't change things for the sake of changing them."

## **Pitchside**

"If you look closely at the pitch, you'll see the camber from one side to the other and from North to South Banks. That was for drainage in the old days. From east to west there is about a 10-inch difference and about two foot from north to south. I'm sure you're all aware we actually have one of the smallest pitches in Europe. When we move to Emirates Stadium, we will have the eighth biggest pitch in Europe. Also the clock, which is part of the history of Arsenal Football Club, will be coming with us, but that will be hanging outside the stadium.

"I'm sure you're all aware where Arsène Wenger sits in the dugout. Then he stands there in the 'technical area' – another new word I've learned since I left school. Where they get them from I don't know.

"Next to Arsène we have Pat Rice, the coach. He's been associated with the Club for many years. I actually grew up with him. He's always screaming and shouting. No one knows what he's saying, but he means well. Next to Pat we have Gary Lewin. Gary was actually a player at this football club. He had a serious injury, so he went on a physio course and he came back to Arsenal to work with the players once he had qualified.

"I'll leave you for five to soak up the atmosphere of being next to the famous pitch and then we'll go into the museum."

## Museum

"Welcome to the museum everybody. This is where you can go on the double-decker parade bus and have your picture taken with Dennis and Freddie. Their cardboard cut-outs anyway. With Dennis's famous problems that's about as high as the great man goes."

Time is allowed for the visitors to wander through the museum to see Herbert Chapman's bowler hat and the wooden chair that stood outside the secretary-manager's office. A note reminds you: "Chapman believed that his sides should be made up of great players and in return he rewarded them well. His Arsenal stars earned £8 a week, a high wage for the time."

There is the football used in the 1936 Cup Final. Arsenal 1, Sheffield United 0. Ted Drake scored the only goal and the squad signed the match ball. Their neat signatures are still dimly visible on the leather. And there is a picture, taken in 1935, of Cliff Bastin beaming over the rim of the communal bath, clutching a cup of tea.

Swirling forward in time, Peter Simpson's tracksuit is on display behind the glass. 'Peter played over 170 first-class matches for Arsenal', says an explanatory note, reminding us of the unfussy centre-half and 1970/1971 Double-winner whose partnership with Frank McLintock in defence was key in the Club's monumental leap into silverware.

Shirts, ancient and modern – the one Alex James wore in the 1936 Cup Final alongside Ian Wright's 1993 Coca Cola Cup Final jersey. The latter is autographed. 'God Bless! There's nothing like this Arsenal.'

The framed quote from Joe Mercer after the 1952 Cup Final (lost to Newcastle, 1-0): 'I thought football's greatest honour was to captain England. I was wrong. It was to captain Arsenal today'.

The gold disc for *Good Old Arsenal* – sung to the tune of *Rule Britannia* – recorded by the players before the 1971 FA Cup Final.

And then there is the Charlie display. Charlie in the rain. Charlie in fluffy sideburns. Charlie tormenting West Bromwich Albion at The Hawthorns. Charlie's Golden Boot award for his Cup Final goal. But a team picture captures him best. All the players looking resolutely forward at the camera, except one. A youthful, long-haired, half-smiling, full of cheek, pale-faced character, with typical idiosyncrasy gazing in the wrong direction. Charlie George.

The real thing comes to say goodbye.

"There's loads of memorabilia to look at. Take your time, enjoy yourselves and I hope you have a great day."

**Sue Mott**



9.

# **A Cup heritage**

The FA Cup will always hold a special place in the history of Arsenal after beating Huddersfield Town in 1930 gave the Gunners their first major trophy

# A record to be envied

In the lengthy scroll of their all-time domestic achievements – 13 times League Champions and eight times runners-up, 10 times FA Cup winners and seven times runners-up – Arsenal can hold their own against their chief rivals Liverpool and Manchester United. Yet their record Cup figures – and these exclude the Football League Cup (twice winners, three times runners-up), Fairs/UEFA Cup (one and one) and Cup Winners' Cup (one and two) – carry an element of prestige that no doubt they would gladly exchange for a superior achievement in the European Cup or, as it became, the Champions League, notwithstanding the Club's valiant effort in reaching the 2006 final. That is a fulfilment as yet absent.

It is in the FA Cup, the world's oldest cup competition, that Arsenal have enjoyed such consistent appearances at Wembley – or recently the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff – that they have left a footprint in every decade since the 1920s, bar wartime 1940s and the lean 1960s. And it should not be overlooked that there have been, in addition, another eight semi-final appearances: 1906 v Newcastle United, 1907 v Sheffield Wednesday, 1928 v Blackburn Rovers, 1973 v Sunderland, 1983 v Manchester United, 1991 v Spurs, 1999 v Manchester United and 2004 v Manchester United. Most impressive of all have been the past 14 years, with five victories and one defeat.

It is no reflection upon them that many of their final appearances have not, on the day, been historic occasions. That is the nature of the event, nowadays broadcast around the globe, its peculiar amalgam of climax and caution tending to inhibit players and limit the full expression of their abilities. Just now and then there has been a masterful display or sudden drama, as against Liverpool in both 1950 and 1971, and most memorably against Manchester United in 1979. What sticks in the mind is the skill and style that Arsenal have exhibited in reaching Wembley five times under the guidance of Arsène Wenger, losing only once when Michael Owen stole the show in the last few minutes in 2001. Even in less than great encounters in the final, Wenger's men have always been absorbing to watch.

And so, we must imagine, were Herbert Chapman's men long ago, though

there is so little evidence on film that we are almost wholly dependent on hearsay, and the reported testimony of other managers of that time and of players in their autobiographies, largely ghosted. What we can be sure about is the stature of some of the great players, from the unanimous praise heaped upon them by well-regarded observers: players such as the legendary Charlie Buchan, Eddie Hapgood, Cliff Bastin, Alex James, Joe Hulme and Ted Drake.

Fame in the FA Cup began, you might say, in 1906 with the Club's first run to the semi-final in their 20-year existence. West Ham United were overcome in an away replay, then Watford by 3-0 and Sunderland, already having been League champions four times, by five goals without reply, an astonishing victory at that time. Manchester United were beaten 3-2 away in the quarter-final. The glory ended at Stoke City's Victoria Ground in the semi-final against the then dominant Newcastle United, five times finalists between 1905 and 1911. Arsenal lost 2-0. The following year, defeating Grimsby Town, Bristol City, Bristol Rovers and Barnsley, their semi-final opponents at St Andrews were Sheffield Wednesday. Arsenal led after 10 minutes, surrendering only when their goalkeeper was injured in a collision. Wednesday scored from the resultant free kick and a further two goals made it 3-1.

It was to be a further 20 years before Arsenal appeared in their first final, and that, too, was to end in disappointment.

**David Miller**

# 1927-2005

1927

## Cardiff City 1 Arsenal 0

The first occasion of reaching the final – the fifth to be staged at the new Wembley – was against Cardiff City in 1927. It came at the end of the second season under Chapman's management and was destined to be an unhappy finale. On the way, Sheffield United, Port Vale (after a home replay), Liverpool, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Southampton had been disposed of, with a goal tally of 12-6. For the first time there would be community singing, accompanied by the band of the Grenadier Guards and conducted by a Mr Thomas Ratcliff. Any doubt about crowd participation disappeared with sterling choruses of wartime favourites, *Pack up your Troubles* and *Tipperary*.

Arsenal had pre-match anxiety about the fitness of Alf Baker, their right-half. So desperate was he to play that, under treatment from Tom Whittaker, only two months after Whittaker's appointment as physiotherapist/trainer, Baker pleaded: "Get me fit and I'll give you my cup medal." Whittaker did, and characteristically declined the offer. As yet, this was not a team with the full Chapman imprint. Charlie Buchan, who'd played in the final for Sunderland 14 years earlier, did his best at the age of 35 to co-ordinate his colleagues, and thanks to him Arsenal dominated the middle of the field, forcing all eight corners in the match. Joe Hulme failed to shine on the wing, but there was little else to raise the hopes of the Welsh, notwithstanding the leeks placed on the crossbar beforehand.

With the game dragging towards stalemate, there were 17 minutes remaining when Hugh Ferguson, Cardiff's centre-forward, took a speculative shot after receiving the ball from a throw-in. On a dry day, the shine on the new leather ball, in combination with the frictionless wool of the jersey of Dan Lewis,

Arsenal's Welsh international goalkeeper, allowed the ball to slide out of his grasp and under his arm. As Lewis twisted in an attempt to re-gather the ball, he succeeded only in further nudging it over the line, and buried his face in his hands in remorse. Thus Cardiff became the only team ever to take the Cup out of England. Their British half-back line of Fred Keenor (Wales), Tom Sloan (Ireland) and Bill Hardy (England) had done much to hold them level till the arrival of that bizarre winning goal.

**Cardiff City** Farquharson, Nelson, Watson, Keenor, Sloan, Hardy, Curtis, Irving, Ferguson, Davies, McLachlan

**Arsenal** Lewis, Parker, Kennedy, Baker, Butler, John, Hulme, Buchan, Brain, Blyth, Hoar

**Referee** WF Bunnell

**Attendance** 91,206

**1930**

### **Arsenal 2 Huddersfield Town 0**

This was perhaps the first time – and there were to be many thereafter – when public expectation was for a classic encounter. Huddersfield Town, twice League champions under Herbert Chapman and then again the season after he left for Highbury, against his current charges, still metaphorically finding their feet but studded with expensive players, not least Alex James. You could say that at Highbury it was more demand than expectation. If this team couldn't win something, well when would they? In Chapman's first four seasons Arsenal had finished second, 11th, 10th and ninth in the League, reaching one Cup semi-final, losing to Blackburn Rovers in 1928. In the current season, for all his expenditure, they had been 14th. His credibility, and no less that of James, hung on the Wembley result. There had been alarms on the way against Chelsea, Birmingham City (replay), Middlesbrough, West Ham United and Hull City (replay). Huddersfield had declined since Chapman's departure, but were no mean proposition.

Never mind the reputation that Arsenal would acquire, unfairly, as defensive automatons, this was still an era when high-scoring matches were common. Prior to the final Arsenal had defeated Sheffield United 8-1, their biggest win since

reaching the First Division 11 years earlier. Then, five days before the final, they had shared 12 goals at Leicester City after being 3-1 down at half-time. On the other hand, Huddersfield, having eliminated previous winners of the Cup in every round and possessing seven internationals in their line-up, were favourites, even though Chapman would have inside knowledge regarding much of their tactics. Scotland winger Alex Jackson was the danger man and the job of shadowing him lay with the youngest man on the field, left-back Eddie Hapgood. So comprehensively was Jackson marked, with Bob John likewise subduing Huddersfield's inside-right Bob Kelly, that the favourites never successfully found their rhythm.

For the first time in a final, the two sides took the field together in honour of the fact that Chapman had managed both teams. Legend has it that the crucial opening goal for Arsenal, after only 17 minutes, was planned not by Chapman but on the coach to the stadium, in conversation between James and Cliff Bastin. "If I get a free kick inside their half, Cliff," James had said, "I'll give you a quick pass, give it straight back and I'll have a go." This now happened. James took a return ball from Bastin and his shot was in the net before Huddersfield realised what was happening. Meanwhile, Arsenal had been having alarms at the other end over the erratic actions of their reserve goalkeeper Charlie Preedy. Deputising for an injured Dan Lewis, and rushing off his goal-line too often, he was regularly out of position and was rescued only by the covering of full-backs Tom Parker and Hapgood. Huddersfield fought strongly for an equaliser and Arsenal's victory was not secure until, with seven minutes remaining, a perfect long through pass from James sent centre-forward Jack Lambert careering through to strike a second goal.

The Cup, presented by King George V, was the Club's first major honour. Chapman could afford to relax, knowing that the combination of his tactical strategies and shrewd transfer dealings was properly taking shape. For James, victory was equally significant. Since first gaining fame as one of the Wembley Wizards in Scotland's destruction of England, there had been critics, not least on account of his switch from the front line to midfield under Chapman's direction. Now his mastery at Wembley had restored the public's faith. "I can recall no man who has ever come out of a Cup Final with so many honours as James, surely he has at last justified himself," wrote Arbiter in the *Daily Mail*.

**Arsenal** Preedy, Parker, Hapgood, Baker, Seddon, John, Hulme, Jack, Lambert, James, Bastin

**Huddersfield Town** Turner, Goodall, Spence, Naylor, Wilson, Campbell,

Jackson, Kelly, Davies, Raw, Smith

**Referee** T Crew

**Attendance** 92,488

**1932**

### **Newcastle United 2 Arsenal 1**

Historians dwell on the fact that the FA Cup final of 1932 against Newcastle United hinged on a decision – or rather the lack of it – as to whether the ball had crossed the dead ball line before being centred for Jack Allen to level the score at 1-1. However, much more significant perhaps was the absence of the greatest player of the age, Alex James. He was denied his place at a time when Arsenal were at their peak under Chapman's leadership, by the most bizarre incident during training the week beforehand. On the Monday prior to the final, 14 players went to Brighton for preparation. Left behind were Joe Hulme and James, both considered by Chapman to be unfit. On the Wednesday morning, Frank Carruthers ran a story in the *Daily Mail*, giving the team for Wembley minus the two injured players and with Pat Beasley on the right-wing in place of Hulme, with Cliff Bastin at inside-left and Bob John taking his place on the left-wing. A shrewd rival journalist, LV Manning of the *Daily Sketch*, contrived to get a photograph for the following morning showing Hulme and James jogging round the pitch at Highbury under the headline: "The two fittest men in football out of the Cup final."

Hulme and James had been receiving regular treatment from Tom Whittaker. Chapman, reading the *Sketch*, was furious that a photographer had been allowed inside Highbury, but immediately ordered the two players to report to Brighton, to assess if they truly were fit. Hulme duly survived rigorous testing, including all-out tackles. So too did James, in front of a bevy of cameramen. Chapman signalled his satisfaction and re-issued a team sheet, including both players. However, a photographer arriving late pleaded with Whittaker for a staged repeat with James. Another challenge, another tackle, and James collapsed, his knee having gone again. So the team was revised a second time, Hulme included rather than Beasley and with Bastin and John forming the left wing. The young, little-known George Male made his Cup debut at left-half in place of John. The changes, and the crucial absence of James, undermined Arsenal's rhythm and, in conjunction with the performance of all three of the match officials, Arsenal



crashed.

Arsenal did take the lead after only 11 minutes. Jimmy Nelson, Newcastle's right-back, misjudged a high cross from Hulme, collided with his goalkeeper Albert McInroy and the loose ball was gladly accepted by John. All seemed comfortable for Arsenal until shortly before half-time. A clearance from Eddie Hapgood was intercepted by Newcastle centre-half Dave Davidson, and returned speculatively up his right wing, with inside-right Jimmy Richardson in hot pursuit. It looked unlikely that he could catch the ball, and Arsenal instinctively relaxed. Richardson kept going and when the ball had crossed the byline, nonetheless hooked it back into the penalty area. Hapgood claimed that he might have blocked the cross, but did not bother, expecting a goalkick. At the moment Richardson hooked the ball back into play, the referee, Bill Harper, was 25 yards away; the linesman on that side of the field more than 30 yards back towards the half-way line and the linesman on the other side some 16 yards back from his corner flag, with admittedly an inadequate crossfield view. Referee Harper did nothing to intervene and Allen swept the ball beyond the reach of Frank Moss in goal. It was symptomatic of that era that there was no discernible physical or verbal dissent by Arsenal's players, though several of them were emphatic that the ball had been out. Male was adamant: "The ball was over. I was there, I saw it." So sure were several of his colleagues that they had in effect stopped playing.

With Allen scoring again midway through the second half, Newcastle became the first team to win at Wembley after being behind, and the first-half controversy served to obscure the fact that the two teams had produced a final memorable in its own right. Chapman made no excuse for defeat. "Frankly, there are none." He was generous in his praise of Newcastle. Some critics, it should be said, consider Chapman had erred by playing Bastin inside instead of on the wing. It was to Arsenal's credit that they put the reverse behind them and took seven points from their remaining four League games to finish only two points behind champions Everton.

**Newcastle United** McInroy, Nelson, Fairhurst, McKenzie, Davidson, Weaver, Boyd, Richardson, Allen, McMenemy, Lang

**Arsenal** Moss, Parker, Hapgood, Jones, Roberts, Male, Hulme, Jack, Lambert, Bastin, John

**Referee** WP Harper

**Attendance** 92,298

**1936**

## **Arsenal 1 Sheffield United 0**

It is not often that the legacy of a manager lingers long after his departure, whether through dismissal, choice, retirement or death. In the case of Herbert Chapman, it was remarkable that the bravura of his team continued powerfully for another three or four seasons. It would be unfair to say that George Allison, broadcaster/entrepreneur/bon viveur/ journalist, though lacking nothing in panache, was merely upholding, with a little lubrication here and there, the principles and practices entrenched under Chapman. Having retained the League title in the season of Chapman's death and having won it for a third time in 1935, they were now back at Wembley again, for the fourth time in 10 years. They still had five of the side that had succumbed against Newcastle: Male, now at right-back, Hapgood, Roberts, Hulme and Bastin. David Jack had retired and the demon of the team was now the formidable Ted Drake at centre-forward, the man who that season had scored seven goals in a League game against Aston Villa. However, his inclusion at Wembley was in doubt following a cartilage operation, and his absence had seriously affected the form of the team, which suffered a spell in March/April of seven games without a win and only six goals scored.

Drake had not returned until a fortnight before the final, scoring the only goal in a home victory which sent Villa into the Second Division for the first time in their history. His return for the final again meant the exclusion of the unfortunate Pat Beasley, who had served on the wing for much of the season and now gave way as Bastin reverted to his preferred position. James, too, was recovering from injury. Arsenal took to the field rearranged and uncertain about their pattern of play, even though facing Second Division opponents. They might have gone behind in the first minute, when Alex Wilson in goal dropped a high cross in front of Sheffield United's insiderright Bobby Barclay, but the keeper somehow managed to smother the following shot. With Arsenal remaining unconvincing, Jock Dodds, United's swift and tenacious centre-forward, struck the crossbar with a header, and United were unfortunate not to be in front by half-time. They were nearly stunned early in the second half by an Arsenal move much rehearsed in training. Drake played a ball back to Ray Bowden in midfield; he switched it square to James, who instantly struck one of those lofted, immaculate passes for which he was famed. Wing-half Jack Crayston had already set off at a gallop and James's pass dropped sweetly in his stride. Only

the finest save by Jack Smith in goal defied Crayston. Thereafter, Sheffield's self-belief wavered. With a quarter of an hour remaining, Bastin's diagonal pass split them and Drake, reading the moment to perfection, was on to the ball in a flash, feinting past centre-half Tom Johnson to drive into the roof of Smith's net, then dropping to the turf from the pain in his injured knee.

Sheffield responded, putting Arsenal under extended pressure, with Dodds hitting the bar. Their luck was out. Arsenal were thankful that James could climb the steps to claim the trophy. James had been surprisingly appointed captain by Allison the day before, with never a word mentioned to Hapgood, who read of the decision in the newspapers.

**Arsenal** Wilson, Male, Hapgood, Crayston, Roberts, Copping, Hulme, Bowden, Drake, James, Bastin

**Sheffield United** Smith, Hooper, Wilkinson, Jackson, Johnson, McPherson, Barton, Barclay, Dodds, Pickering, Williams

**Referee** H Natrass

**Attendance** 93,384

## 1950

### **Arsenal 2 Liverpool 0**

Tom Whittaker, physio-cum-fitness fanatic, succeeded George Allison and upheld what had become, in the wake of Chapman, established Highbury tradition: self-discipline, rigorous training, selfless team spirit and a tactical policy broadly dependent on fast counter-attacking. Whittaker was not a student of tactics to the same extent as Chapman, and football as a whole was still essentially dependent on the ability of players rather than managerial wisdom. If you discovered, or had the money to buy, good players, you would probably have a good team. Arsenal in the 1950s had an array of international players in defence: George Swindin in goal, Laurie Scott and Walley Barnes at fullback, a half-back line of Alex Forbes, Leslie Compton and Joe Mercer. They had also a little genius of an inside-forward called Jimmy Logie. They had recaptured the League title in 1948 and were to finish sixth this season. The final was also notable for the presence of the Compton brothers: on the left wing Denis, the cricketing Galahad whose football career was drawing to a close through a knee

injury, and Leslie, who later that year became the oldest player to make his England debut, being picked to play against Wales two months after his 38th birthday.

Although Arsenal arrived at Wembley with one of the oldest teams, boasting an average age over 30, experience was their forte and on the day Liverpool found themselves unexpectedly outclassed. They had made the unwise decision of dropping their veteran schemer at insiderright, Jack Balmer, selecting in preference the inexperienced Kevin Baron. Arsenal, finding themselves on a wet pitch on an afternoon of sustained drizzle, reversed their intended tactics, preferring a short-passing game instead of their customary long-ball system. They thus controlled the middle of the field, denying Liverpool possession, and were ahead after only 17 minutes. Leslie Compton headed a Liverpool clearance wide to Barnes, who fed the ball forward to Logie. The little man threaded a perfectly weighted pass beyond centre-half Hughes and there was centre-forward Reg Lewis gliding through to stroke the simplest of goals.

With Billy Liddell, their famed left-winger, being contained by Lawrie Scott, Liverpool could find little answer and a quarter of an hour into the second half, Lewis scored again. A late revival by Liverpool, their left-half Bill Jones heading against the crossbar from Liddell's corner, was too little and too late. Arsenal's dominance had never seriously been threatened. Both Alex Forbes, a youthful, dynamic Scot preferred at right-half to Archie Macaulay, and Mercer had seldom played better. It was an appropriately authoritative display by Mercer, who had been elected Footballer of the Year the previous day.

**Arsenal** Swindin, Scott, Barnes, Forbes, L Compton, Mercer, Cox, Logie, Goring, Lewis, D Compton

**Liverpool** Sidlow, Lambert, Spicer, Taylor, Hughes, Jones, Payne, Baron, Stubbins, Fagan, Liddell

**Referee** H Pearce

**Attendance** 100,000

**1952**

**Newcastle United 1 Arsenal 0**

With hindsight it is astonishing that it took the Football Association so long to

recognise that in the interests of fair play – never mind the paying public – substitutes needed to be permitted as football became progressively more competitive and the physical load upon players more extreme. Arsenal lost the Cup Final of 1952 against Newcastle United at least partially on account of being reduced to 10 men for three quarters of the match, full-back Walley Barnes damaging a knee midway through the first half, limping ineffectually on the wing for 10 minutes and then retiring to the dressing room. Similar injuries were to blight at least three finals in the next few years. Yet in the face of misfortune, and led by the undaunted Joe Mercer, Arsenal's 10 men produced, in defeat, one of the most memorable matches of the century.

Problems had dogged Arsenal prior to the final, with four of their players under treatment, plus the pressure of fixtures. Nine matches, including a replayed semi-final against Chelsea, were compressed into the month of April. Don Roper, Doug Lishman, Ray Daniel and Jimmy Logie were all affected. Centre-half Daniel had only had a plaster removed from a broken arm five days previously but was permitted, with agreement from Newcastle, to play with a light plastic shield. The main concern was Logie, who had suffered infection of hair follicles on the thigh from embrocation during extended therapeutic massage, and he had climbed out of bed only a week before the final. It was unlikely he would be fit.

Newcastle, by contrast, were trouble free. The crisis, as it became, arrived when Barnes, turning quickly on Wembley's lush turf in an attempt to contain mercurial winger Bobby Mitchell near the corner flag, twisted his knee. Following treatment he continued, only to tear the ligament further shortly afterwards in a tackle on George Robledo. That was the end for unhappy Barnes in his 58th game of the season.

Mercer, the captain, now produced one of the finest displays of his career. He withdrew Roper from the wing to full-back and with his colleagues set about stifling every Newcastle move, harrying, tackling and tackling again any and every opponent. With the renowned Jackie Milburn at centre-forward, Newcastle's was one of the foremost attacks in the League, but as the minutes passed, they found themselves held in every sphere, and especially by the half-back line of Alex Forbes and Daniel alongside Mercer. As a teenager at Everton, Mercer had been told by the illustrious Dixie Dean that he had not got the legs "to do a postman's round", yet here he was covering every proverbial blade of Wembley's wide pitch. Time ebbed away, Newcastle mounted their attacks ever more desperately, George Swindin in goal bore a charmed life as he defied everything fired at him. There was, miraculously, even a moment when Arsenal counter-attacked, and a corner kick by Fred Cox was headed against the crossbar

by Lishman. With five minutes remaining, and Roper lying injured on the edge of his own penalty area, the ball sped once more to Mitchell. With Mercer pleading unavailingly to referee Arthur Ellis to halt the game for Roper to be treated, Mitchell swung the ball into the middle, and on the far side of the area George Robledo headed down and in off the post. Only now was Roper allowed treatment.

First into Arsenal's dressing room after Newcastle had collected the trophy – for the only time from a Prime Minister, Winston Churchill – was their chairman Stan Seymour to say: "We've won the Cup, but you've won the honours." And as an indomitable Mercer declared at the evening banquet: "Always I thought that football's greatest honour was to captain England, but I was wrong. It was to captain Arsenal today."

**Newcastle United** Simpson, Cowell, McMichael, Harvey, Brennan, E Robledo, Walker, Foulkes, Milburn, G Robledo, Mitchell

**Arsenal** Swindin, Barnes, Smith, Forbes, Daniel, Mercer, Cox, Logie, Holton, Lishman, Roper

**Referee** A Ellis

**Attendance** 100,000

## 1971

### **Arsenal 2 Liverpool 1 (aet)**

It is a truism that players, not managers or coaches, make great events. The final of 1971 will forever carry the image of a winning goal by Charlie George in extra time. Yet it is equally true that within the fabric of 90 minutes' play, or 120, there are moments, often unseen, perhaps even psychological, that are attributable to the planning or the subtlety of someone not on the field. Certainly it can be claimed that in the gaining of the second leg of their historic Double there lay elements of psychology and strategy attributable to both Bertie Mee and Don Howe, and which possibly tipped the scales in a Herculean encounter between two fine sides. Fame or anguish can at times hang by a thread.

There was no sharper exponent of oneupmanship than Bill Shankly, Liverpool's manager, but in the quarter of an hour prior to kick-off on May 8, he was shrewdly upstaged by Mee. It had become customary at Wembley that teams

were called from their dressing room by an FA official, to walk side-by-side up a sloping tunnel, emerging into the stadium to that deafening roar of welcome. There have been players who have never emotionally survived that experience during the subsequent action. On this occasion, Mee sent a message to the officials that Arsenal were just finishing their team talk. With Liverpool already in the tunnel, mentally fretting, a second call was made. Another excuse for the delay was relayed to the official. At the third time of asking, Arsenal duly emerged, metaphorically a goal up. Argentina would do precisely the same to Holland in the World Cup Final of 1978 in Buenos Aires. Shankly was left grinding his teeth. Whether Arsenal carried any advantage into the game temperamentally is by the way. It was almost four minutes before they entered the Liverpool half, during which time they had already given away four free kicks for obstruction and rash tackling.

There was undoubtedly a crucial intervention by Howe during extra time, as the players of both teams began to flag on an afternoon of glorious sunshine and draining heat. Frank McLintock and the rest, none more than Charlie George, were as weary as their rivals, despite the fact that Arsenal had prepared during training at London Colney on turf allowed to grow long to simulate the lush conditions at Wembley. Arsenal went behind two minutes into the extra period after a rare misjudgment by Bob Wilson. Wilson left a gap on his near post when advancing slightly from his line, in anticipation of a cross from Steve Heighway as he cut in from the left wing. This allowed Heighway to instantly exploit the tiny space between Wilson and the post. Something urgent was needed. Howe's message from the touchline was for George and George Graham to switch positions, Graham moving forward to generate fresh momentum. He had been a striker earlier in his career with Chelsea, prior to acquiring the tag of "Stroller" on account of his measured play in Arsenal's midfield. On this day he had been outstanding, and Howe's ruse was now to be crucial.

Wilson had thankfully kept his team afloat, atoning for his blunder within moments with a superb low save of a close-range shot from Brian Hall. With four minutes remaining in the first period of extra time, a high ball lobbed into the penalty area by John Radford brought confusion among a cluster of defenders: Larry Lloyd, Emlyn Hughes, Tommy Smith and Chris Lawler. As the ball dropped, substitute Eddie Kelly half-hit a shot with Ray Clemence in goal unsighted. As the ball rolled between a sea of legs, Graham took a swing and claimed the goal as Clemence stood staring in disbelief. A video replay the following day by London Weekend Television – at that time an innovative technique – appeared to reveal that Graham had not made contact and the goal was credited to Kelly. At this point Howe was preparing mentally for the replay,

and decided to switch the players yet again, and to pull Graham back behind the ball to bolster the defence. George, therefore, returned up front. The move was to help produce one of the most dramatic climaxes in Cup final history. With a replay nine minutes away, George, receiving the ball from Radford, with the last of his energy unleashed a ferocious shot from 20 yards which flew wide of Clemence, taking a minor deflection on the way. It was a blow from the 21-year-old worthy of St George himself.

This crowning moment erased once and for all the legacy of repressive memories of the Chapman regime.

**Arsenal** Wilson, Rice, McLintock, Simpson, McNab, Storey (Kelly), Graham, Armstrong, Radford, George, Kennedy

**Liverpool** Clemence, Lawler, Lloyd, Hughes, Lindsay, Smith, Callaghan, Hall, Evans (P Thompson), Toshack, Heighway

**Referee** N Burtenshaw

**Attendance** 100,000

## 1972

### Leeds United 1 Arsenal 0

Some have alleged that the success of Bertie Mee's teams was the product of hard, no-frills, defensive football. That overlooked a degree of skill, though competitive they certainly were. By the time of their fifth FA Cup, League Cup and Fairs Cup final in five years, it must be conceded that belated action by the Football Association during this season to reduce the intensity of physical challenge by stricter penalisation of offenders had partially removed Arsenal's bite, metaphoric and real. No analysis of the Centenary Final would be complete without credit being given to David Smith, the referee, who at the close of this anti-permissive season imposed discipline which had too often been missing from Wembley. He penalised the fastest foul of 100 finals – obstruction after three seconds by Allan Clarke, of Leeds United, on Alan Ball – and then booked Bob McNab within a minute for a foul on Peter Lorimer, setting an immediate tone of authority. Some said he was excessive in subsequent bookings of Norman Hunter for a foul on Ball and of Billy Bremner and Charlie George for verbal dissent, yet here was control that was urgently needed.



In another Cup encounter with Leeds – less dreary than the League Cup affair of 1968 – the difference between the two teams was that in Johnny Giles, Eddie Gray, Clarke and Lorimer, Leeds possessed deeper resources of technique than their rivals, never mind the arrival by now of Ball, the World Cup hero signed from Everton. To a degree, the unfortunate Ball was part of Arsenal's problem; the style of play had yet to be fully adapted (Don Howe having departed for West Bromwich Albion) to accommodate Ball's function in midfield. On first arrival at Highbury he had been bypassed, the ball flying overhead, and, on a damp day at Wembley, Ball's repetitive stabbed passes over a short distance never really found a rhythm with his colleagues.

For Leeds, the most consistent team in Europe over the past eight years, their victory by Clarke's only goal 10 minutes into the second half was partial answer to the accusation that they were a great team incapable of locking the door behind them when on the brink of success. This time they overpowered Arsenal in their most authoritative style, and the final margin might well have been two or three. For Arsenal, the game had a double edge, for Leeds were poised to emulate their own achievement of the Double 12 months earlier. Due to play Wolves a few days later, the League title seemed to be there for the taking. In the event, Leeds would maintain their reputation, and stumble at Molineux. Their success in the Football League thus far, champions of 1968/1969, was no reflection of their domestic prominence, never mind their Fairs Cup victories of 1968 and 1971. The fact was that their wilful exploitation of the laws – freely acknowledged in later years by their own players such as Giles and Eddie Gray – made them universally unpopular anywhere outside Yorkshire. If they now exhibited some of their art, at Arsenal's expense, it must be doubted if the memory will have dwelt long with the Queen, who graced the occasion with one of her rare appearances at a football match.

The only changes in Arsenal's team from the previous year were Geoff Barnett in goal for an injured Bob Wilson, and Ball for Ray Kennedy. On a disappointing day, their best player was Peter Simpson in defence, Ball, Peter Storey and George Graham in midfield being outshone by Bremner and Gray. Clarke's goal came as Jack Charlton halted an Arsenal attack midway inside the Leeds half and slipped the ball forward to Lorimer. He fed it out to Mick Jones, who had moved to the right wing. Accelerating past Bob McNab on the outside, Jones pulled back a centre and Clarke, veering wide of Simpson, stooped to head chest-high beyond Barnett.

**Leeds United** Harvey, Reaney, Charlton, Hunter, Madeley, Bremner, Giles,

Gray, Lorimer, Clarke, Jones

**Arsenal** Barnett, Rice, McLintock, Simpson, McNab, Storey, Ball, Graham, Armstrong, George, Radford (Kennedy)

**Referee** DW Smith

**Attendance** 100,000

**1978**

### **Ipswich Town 1 Arsenal 0**

The inherent insecurity of Don Revie used to communicate itself to his Leeds players, undermining their confidence. Terry Neill, with hindsight, wonders whether his own nervousness about his first Cup Final as manager found an echo in his team when they faced Ipswich Town. After two years in charge, having succeeded Bertie Mee, his team was close to finding equilibrium. He had brought in Pat Jennings from Tottenham Hotspur, still one of the most impenetrable goalkeepers, while David O'Leary had emerged as a central defender comparable to Frank McLintock. "It was not one of the best post-war finals," Neill recalls. "Neither side was at its best. I blame myself for making ill-advised comments a few days beforehand, when I admitted my nervousness to the players. My particular worry concerned Liam Brady, one of five players we had nursing an injury. We played him on the day because a 50 per cent-fit Brady was a better bet than one of the reserves. Bobby Robson, Ipswich's manager, was moaning in the newspapers about their injuries, but on the day was able to put out his usual side."

Because less fashionable Ipswich proved to be the winners by the only goal, scored by Roger Osborne a quarter of an hour from the end, this final tended not to be granted the credit it deserved. Both sides had scored freely on the way to Wembley, Malcolm Macdonald for Arsenal and Paul Mariner for Ipswich each having hit seven goals. The match was distinguished by concise football and exemplary behaviour from both teams. Early on Mariner struck the crossbar with Jennings well beaten, and, with Brady selfevidently less than fully fit, Alan Hudson was not doing sufficient to compensate against an Ipswich midfield in which Brian Talbot and John Wark were strident. Additionally, there was a constant threat from Clive Woods on Ipswich's left-wing, continually extending Pat Rice. Occasionally, Woods would switch to the right to bother Sammy Nelson. Before the decisive goal, Wark had twice crashed shots against a post. A

limping Brady had been replaced soon after an hour by Graham Rix, but Arsenal could not establish any hold on the play. A run down the right flank by David Geddis, almost to the byline, ended with a low centre, Willie Young clearing weakly with his left foot. The ball flew to Osborne and his open shot was too much for Jennings. It was also too much for Osborne, so emotionally wrought was he by the experience that he immediately had to be substituted. Defeat left Neill and Don Howe – who had returned to Highbury once more as coach – needing to resolve a variety of issues: Macdonald's suspect knee, Hudson's inconsistency, Young's erratic defending. Answers were needed if Arsenal were to become a force once again.

**Ipswich Town** Cooper, Burley, Hunter, Beattie, Mills, Talbot, Wark, Osborne (Lambert), Geddis, Mariner, Woods

**Arsenal** Jennings, Rice, Young, O'Leary, Nelson, Price, Brady (Rix), Hudson, Sunderland, Macdonald, Stapleton

**Referee** DRG Nippard

**Attendance** 100,000

**1979**

### **Arsenal 3 Manchester United 2**

It was appropriate that when Liam Brady produced the finest of all his performances for Arsenal, a climactic killer-blow against Manchester United in the most tumultuous last five minutes witnessed since Stanley Matthews schemed the snatching of the Cup by Blackpool in 1953, that the maestro himself should have been present to applaud Brady's deed. Each was a magician. If Matthews was a more mesmeric dribbler, Brady had 360 degree vision and a laser passing-touch that could carve the opposition apart in split seconds. It was this that he now demonstrated. "Has there ever been a Final like this?" thundered the next day's *Sunday Express*. Well, yes, of course there had, but maybe the headline writer had not been out of short trousers when Matthews wove his spell over Bolton Wanderers.

This unforgettable FA Cup triumph by Arsenal overflowed with the joy and pain of life's always uncertain river. The historic prize, uniquely valued in England and won with seconds to spare by Brady's sumptuous natural gifts, had

extracted all that Manchester United could give, only to leave them as desolate as castaways. "I'm proud we were a part of something as dramatic as this," said a philosophical Dave Sexton, United's manager. "Yet it was cruel for us – having to run uphill for almost the whole game, reaching the top, and then falling off. I don't particularly blame our boys, they'd expended 89 minutes of draining energy, mental and physical. It wasn't that we relaxed, just that Arsenal caught us on the counter-punch. The fact we came back to make such an historic finish typifies the quality and character that has developed at United. In defeat, United's honour and pride were intact."

Part of the fascination of this match was attempting to analyse where lay the more influential passport to success. Was it a commitment to free attack, as pursued by United under Sexton's direction, or organised possession and physical resolution, as much a characteristic of Arsenal, Brady apart, as it had been under Bertie Mee? Who was more central to Arsenal's victory, Brady or Brian Talbot (the latter signed by Neill in recognition of his immense contribution for Ipswich a year earlier)? What could not be ignored, leaving aside the remarkable closing phase, was that for much of the first half there was only one team in the match – and they were two down at half-time. Arsenal had had three attacks and scored twice. A unique holder of successive winners' medals with different clubs, Talbot left his footprint on every blade of Wembley's turf. He scored the first goal and ran United's veins almost empty in the second half. Howe was ecstatic afterwards about Talbot's contribution, yet while Brady was a celebrated international player for the Republic of Ireland, Talbot was at that time not even in Ron Greenwood's England squad for the Home Championship. He had played five times under Don Revie in 1976/1977. So, in the dispute of ideals, which of two lieutenants assisting Greenwood at international level was right, Neill/ Howe of Arsenal or Sexton of United?

In his duel with Willie Young, still there at the heart of Arsenal's defence, Joe Jordan, Scotland's lofty striker, took the honours, but it was to prove in vain. The first arrow to United's heart came as Brady, holding off repeated challenges, found Frank Stapleton on the right. A piercing near-post pass found David Price, who pulled the ball back for Talbot to get the touch in a joint lunge with Alan Sunderland. The next 30 minutes belonged almost wholly to United but almost inevitably, given their attacking emphasis, they were caught four against five in defence a minute before half-time, when Brady bamboozled three men and Stapleton did the rest. Gordon McQueen, a big, central defender with an artist inside trying to get out, urged United forward throughout the second half. Whether it was relevant to what happened next is speculative, but with only five minutes to go Steve Walford replaced Price, partially to introduce fresh legs but

also to ensure him a winners' medal, given that Arsenal were seemingly secure. Yet now it was McQueen who fittingly cut Arsenal back by scoring from Jordan's square pass to set up the intoxicating finale. Before Arsenal could adjust either to their team change or to conceding a goal, Steve Coppell – these days in charge at Reading – put Sammy McIlroy through for a delirious equaliser. With Brian Greenhoff warming up on the touchline for extra time, straight from the kick-off Brady swayed snakelike once more towards United's goal, simultaneously drawing and eluding McQueen, Lou Macari – his unavailing marker throughout – and Martin Buchan. A pass out to Rix on the left, a cross to the far post, a lunging half-volley by Sunderland, under pressure from full-back Arthur Albiston, and Arsenal were in seventh heaven.

**Arsenal** Jennings, Rice, Young, O'Leary, Nelson, Price (Walford), Brady, Talbot, Rix, Sunderland, Stapleton

**Manchester United** Bailey, Nicholl, McQueen, Buchan, Albiston, Coppell, McIlroy, Macari, Thomas, J Greenhoff, Jordan

**Referee** R Challice

**Attendance** 100,000

**1980**

**West Ham United 1 Arsenal 0**

Arsenal had endured an exhausting and extended struggle to overcome Liverpool in a semi-final involving three replays and there was a theory that an in-built element of caution in their game would allow underdogs West Ham United the time and space to exploit flaws in their rearguard. West Ham could repeat the historic achievement of Sunderland against Leeds United in 1973, because Arsenal would grant them too much respect and then be made to pay for it. So it proved. Arsenal had not forgotten what happened when they had tried to make an exhibition of the Charity Shield against Liverpool at the beginning of the season, and the experience had left its scar. In the meeting of the lion and the antelope, the race was likely to go to the swift rather than the strong, though there was always a chance that the antelope might get mauled.

Arsenal were the stronger, better-equipped, more experienced side. Yet their game, like that over-simplified definition of sculpture, was to chip away

carefully all the bits they did not want, leaving the end product: victory. West Ham would be willing to let them chip, gambling that in an open game they would have everything to gain, and in Alan Devonshire the player to exploit it. John Lyall, West Ham's manager, opting not to man-mark Liam Brady, insisted beforehand: "You've got to ensure you're emphatic about your own strengths, that you do what you're used to doing."

The notable facts of West Ham's singlegoal victory were that Paul Allen became the youngest player to appear in a Wembley final, at 17 years and 256 days, taking the record away from Howard Kendall. [Curtis Weston is the youngest player, at 17 years and 119 days, to appear in any Cup final (for Millwall in 2004), breaking the record of James Prinsep (Clapham Rovers, 1879).] Allen was told by Lyall to shadow Brady if and where possible. Also, the winner, in the 13th minute, was a rare goal by Trevor Brooking, even more rarely with his head. That was a riposte to Brian Clough, habitually a controversial television commentator in between managing Nottingham Forest, who had said beforehand that Brooking "floats like a butterfly – and stings like one", notwithstanding that he had once tried to sign him. Allen did an admirable job in the first half in subduing Brady's creativity, and though Brady pulled out all the stops after half-time, by then it proved to be too late. "My best moment [in the Cup] was the Final in 1979," Brady recalls. "The worst came the following year, losing two finals in four days, against West Ham and Valencia in the Cup Winners' Cup. I read nowadays about playing so many games, and players being tired, but that season we played something like 70 games. The West Ham final was on a boiling-hot day, they got an early goal and just sat back, and we found it very difficult to break them down." Lyall's planning had been meticulous, pushing Stuart Pearson and David Cross out wide in attack to stall overlapping by Pat Rice and John Devine at full-back, thereby allowing David O'Leary and Willie Young to have the ball in central defence. West Ham would get tight on Alan Sunderland and Frank Stapleton, so that O'Leary or Young would be obliged to play the ball out wide, and when delayed crosses finally came over, they would be square rather than diagonal, making the clearance angles better for West Ham's defence. With Billy Bonds and Alvin Martin stifling Sunderland and Stapleton, no amount of Brady's expertise could open the way for Arsenal's counter-attacking. The goal was text-book West Ham style. Alan Devonshire on the left flank evaded Brian Talbot, then out-paced Rice. Jennings in goal could barely reach the cross with his fingertips, Cross and Pearson awaiting the dropping ball. Cross's shot was blocked, the rebound flew to Pearson, and he immediately centred again to Brooking who, anticipating the movement, was on hand six yards out to head home unopposed. Thereafter,

Brooking outshone Brady to seal a performance that confirmed his understated ability as one of the foremost midfield players. "The odds were against us because of our fixture pile-up, but West Ham were worthy winners," Terry Neill reflected. "Though our players were not enjoying optimum mental or physical fitness, I did not use that as an excuse. It was West Ham's day. Ours, we had hoped, would come the following Wednesday against Valencia." A vain hope, as it turned out.

**West Ham United** Parkes, Stewart, Bonds, Martin, Lampard, Devonshire, Brooking, Pike, Allen, Pearson, Cross

**Arsenal** Jennings, Rice, O'Leary, Young, Devine (Nelson), Price, Talbot, Brady, Rix, Sunderland, Stapleton

**Referee** G Courtney

**Attendance** 100,000

## 1993

**Arsenal 1 Sheffield Wednesday 1 (aet)**

**Replay: Arsenal 2 Sheffield Wednesday 1 (aet)**

There are good finals and poor finals – and the FA Cup Final of 1993 unequivocally fell in the latter category, though the honour for an individual of reaching Wembley remains indissoluble. You could not blame the players for the fact that fixture congestion rendered this match between Arsenal and Sheffield Wednesday a non-event, embarrassingly beamed to 70 countries by television. Unresolved at the first attempt, the replay five days later was the teams' seventh game in 18 days. Both managers – George Graham, for Arsenal, and Trevor Francis, for Sheffield Wednesday, each a former player of distinction – had to take some responsibility for critical reaction to the manner in which they allowed the first match to grind its way to stalemate. However, by the 1990s the pressure on managers to avoid failure, rather than go for victory, had become ever more emphatic.

The clubs had already met a month earlier at Wembley in the League Cup Final, Arsenal winning 2-1, and with the FA Cup semi-finals also having been played at Wembley, the national stadium was fast becoming a second home to both teams. The first attempt at the FA Cup brought an opening goal for Arsenal

in the first half by Ian Wright, playing through the pain of a recently broken toe and being replaced by David O'Leary for extra time. David Hirst had levelled the score in the second half. It could be said the most novel aspect of this first match was that, for the first time, both sides wore their names and squad numbers on the backs of their shirts. Wright, who had scored twice for Crystal Palace in the 1990 final against Manchester United – in a 3-3 draw, United winning the replay – expertly took his goal after 21 minutes. Andy Linighan's position in central defence had been threatened since February by the signing of Martin Keown from Everton, but with Keown cup-tied, it was Linighan's header from a free kick by Paul Davis that presented Wright with his chance to beat the able Chris Woods. Hirst's equaliser on the hour came from a cross by American John Harkes.

And so to the replay, which attracted the smallest crowd, 62,267, for such an event at Wembley, less even than the two semi-finals. Entertainment remained at a premium – there were so many stoppages for injury, and appearances by trainers, that the first half alone ran to 53 minutes. A crash on the M1 motorway, with 20-mile tailbacks, had led to a half-hour delay in the evening kick-off, and by the time many Wednesday fans reached the stadium, Arsenal were already ahead. Graham had included the experienced Alan Smith in place of Ray Parlour, and in the 35th minute it was Smith who fed the ball into the path of Wright. Dancing past two defenders, the mercurial Wright artfully chipped over an advancing Chris Woods for his fourth goal in FA Cup Finals. It was also his 30th goal of the season in all matches for Arsenal. Wednesday, undismayed, soon struck back, Chris Waddle glancing a cross from Harkes beyond the diving David Seaman, aided by Lee Dixon's partial deflection. Again extra time arrived and, with only a minute remaining before a penalty shoot-out, Linighan advanced from defence for a corner by Paul Merson, and his header was too powerful for Woods. Thus Arsenal became the first club to win both FA Cup and League Cup in the same season.

**Arsenal** Seaman, Dixon, Linighan, Adams, Winterburn, Jensen, Davis, Parlour (Smith), Merson, Wright (O'Leary), Campbell

**Sheffield Wednesday** Woods, Nilsson, Worthington, Warhurst, Anderson (Hyde), Harkes, Palmer, Sheridan, Waddle (Bart-Williams), Hirst, Bright

**Referee** K Barratt

**Attendance** 79,347



## **Replay**

**Arsenal** Seaman, Dixon, Linighan, Adams, Winterburn, Jensen, Davis, Merson, Smith, Wright (O'Leary), Campbell

**Sheffield Wednesday** Woods, Nilsson (Bart-Williams), Worthington, Warhurst, Wilson (Hyde), Harkes, Palmer, Sheridan, Waddle, Hirst, Bright

**Referee** K Barratt

**Attendance** 62,267

## **1998**

### **Arsenal 2 Newcastle United 0**

If the story of the FA Cup Final of 1998 was Arsenal's achievement of their second League and Cup Double, after a 27-year interval, the sub-plot was the anonymity of Alan Shearer, England's current centre-forward, embarrassingly devoid of support from his Newcastle United colleagues. The inadequacy of tactical planning by their manager, Kenny Dalglish, such a marvel himself as a player, was punished by the strategic excellence of the Frenchman now in charge at Highbury. Arsène Wenger had brought academic vigour to the Club, building a side around two exceptional compatriots in midfield, Patrick Vieira and Emmanuel Petit, and two Dutch delights in attack: Marc Overmars on the wing and the impeccable Dennis Bergkamp as a withdrawn central striker. The Premier League had been won ahead of arch-rivals Manchester United, and a lukewarm event on a baking afternoon at Wembley proved something of a formality.

A perceived setback for Arsenal beforehand was that Bergkamp, elected Footballer of the Year by the football writers that week, was excluded from Wembley by a hamstring injury. The sceptics questioned the resulting selection up front of a relatively inexperienced Nicolas Anelka alongside Christopher Wreh, to the exclusion of the iconic Ian Wright, then Arsenal's top scorer of all time. Doubters underestimated the manager's choice. It was Petit who schemed the move that gave Arsenal the lead within 24 minutes. His flighted pass beyond the defence allowed Overmars to shake off a challenge by full-back Alessandro Pistone and rifle a shot through the legs of advancing goalkeeper Shay Given. Across much of the previous century, that narrow margin had been so often sufficient to give Arsenal victory. Now it was only briefly threatened for a few moments in the second half, when defender Nikos Dabizas headed against

Arsenal's crossbar and then Shearer, exploiting an error by Keown, struck a post. Beyond that moment, Shearer was left clutching at thin air, demeaning himself and the occasion with petty fouling which brought from Wenger the most gracious of reprimands: "He got frustrated in the first half and lost a little bit of his control."

The frustration was understandable. In midfield, Robert Lee and David Batty were all but over-run by their French counterparts, backed by the inexhaustible Ray Parlour on the right flank. In the 68th minute, victory was made secure when the 19-year-old Anelka galloped through a stricken Newcastle defence on to a pass from Parlour to hammer the ball wide of Given. It was a match commendably refereed by Paul Durkin, about to be England's representative at the World Cup in France. For Arsenal, it was a climax beyond expectation at the turn of the year, when they had stood fifth in the Premiership table, a dozen points adrift of Manchester United, and had even been held to a goalless draw at Highbury in the third round of the Cup by Port Vale. That hiccup, moreover, had been resolved only by penalties in the replay and, after defeating Middlesbrough, it had required replays against Crystal Palace and West Ham respectively in the fifth and sixth rounds, the latter again needing penalties. The cream had come to the surface only by degrees, but the impact of three Frenchmen on the English game, in the year that the country which founded the World Cup were to win the title for the first time, was immense.

**Arsenal** Seaman, Dixon, Keown, Adams, Winterburn, Parlour, Vieira, Petit, Overmars, Wreh (Platt), Anelka

**Newcastle United** Given, Pistone, Dabizas, Howey, Pearce (Andersson), Barton (Watson), Lee, Batty, Speed, Ketsbaia (Barnes), Shearer

**Referee** P Durkin

**Attendance** 79,183

## 2001

### Liverpool 2 Arsenal 1

It is unusual for any team to lose a match as one-sided as was this FA Cup Final, a strategic battle between the charges of two French managers, Arsène Wenger and Gérard Houllier. That Houllier and his men walked off with the prize was

thanks to the opportunism of the diminutive, dynamic Michael Owen, snatching two goals in the last seven minutes at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. This was the first final to be played outside England, on account of the demolition and protracted rebuilding of Wembley. As significant as Owen's contribution, perhaps more so, was a sequence of escapes for Liverpool, both legitimate and illegal. Most conspicuously, in the 17th minute Gilles Grimandi had sent Thierry Henry racing through, the striker rounding goalkeeper Sander Westerveld, and shooting from an acute angle. The ball was deflected behind for a corner by a tottering Swiss central defender, Stéphane Henchoz. Most of those in the stadium, including Henry, believed the ball has struck Henchoz's left arm, with referee Steve Dunn unhappily thinking the ball had hit the post. Worse, the linesman saw the handling but deemed it unintentional.

More misfortune was to dog Arsenal's dominance of most of the play, with little being seen of Liverpool's usually efficient counterattacking, under Houllier's direction, by Danny Murphy, Steven Gerrard, Dietmar Hamann and Vladimir Smicer. However, the game remained goalless at half-time and, though Liverpool afterwards began to be more adventurous, they continued to benefit from the rub of the green. Ten minutes into the second half, the ball fell free as Henry and Westerveld each failed to control it. Ashley Cole seemed certain to score from the edge of the goal area only for centre-back Sami Hyypia to block the shot on the line with an outstretched leg. Moments later, the Finn was again clearing after Westerveld had been beaten by Freddie Ljungberg's clever chip. It was Ljungberg who finally broke the deadlock in the 72nd minute. A poor clearance by Westerveld was seized on by Robert Pires, whose pass sent Ljungberg swerving around the goalkeeper to give Arsenal the lead they so deserved. Minutes later, a fine save by Westerveld denied Henry a further goal and, with seven minutes remaining, Liverpool's fortune further prospered.

A free kick by substitute Gary McAllister was knocked down by Markus Babel, and Owen was on hand, in the split second available, to volley home. Four minutes on, and with Arsenal pressing forward in search of a winner, they lost possession. Patrik Berger's sweetly timed pass sent Owen racing clear of Lee Dixon, then veering away from Tony Adams, leaning right to deceive David Seaman and curving a left-foot shot beyond him. "We feel guilty because we should have scored the goals that were there, and we gave some cheap goals away," lamented Wenger. An upbeat Houllier, barely able to comprehend the reversal in his team's fortunes, played the victor's card.

"I'd told the players beforehand that Arsenal were probably a bit better, a bit more mature and experienced," he said. "I told them that what can make a difference today is mental strength – the will to win is more important than the

skill to win." Perhaps so, given a referee's singular indiscretion.

**Liverpool** Westerveld, Babel, Henchoz, Hyypia, Carragher, Murphy (Berger), Gerrard, Hamann (McAllister), Smicer (Fowler), Heskey, Owen

**Arsenal** Seaman, Dixon (Bergkamp), Keown, Adams, Cole, Pires, Grimandi, Vieira, Ljungberg (Kanu), Wiltord (Parlour), Henry

**Referee** S Dunn

**Attendance** 72,500

## 2002

### Arsenal 2 Chelsea 0

Another Cup Final, another Double, though the completion of the latter would have to wait until four days after the FA Cup had been won – fairly straightforwardly against Chelsea – when the team had to travel to play Manchester United. At Old Trafford, a draw would be sufficient against the defending champions to give Arsenal the Premiership title. In the event, the only goal of the game against United came from Sylvain Wiltord, following the pair at the Millennium Stadium by Ray Parlour and Freddie Ljungberg against Chelsea, and it brought Arsenal their second Double in five seasons. If lady luck had frowned upon them in Cardiff the previous year, this time, with a strange act of unintended assistance by Chelsea's manager Claudio Ranieri, Arsenal were to smile gratefully.

Their central defenders Tony Adams and Sol Campbell could not have felt more comfortable, when learning that Ranieri had decided to risk central striker Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink's calf injury at the start. All too predictably, Hasselbaink was unable to make any impact, his feared partnership with Eidur Gudjohnsen from Iceland never getting into gear. It would be a crucial tactical negative for Chelsea, whereas Arsène Wenger, by comparison, judged everything just right. Arsenal's manager had to decide, for instance, between his two senior goalkeepers: David Seaman, in outstanding form since returning from injury in February, and Richard Wright, who had played in five of Arsenal's six Cup games since the fourth-round home win over Liverpool. Seaman was the choice, and as a pragmatic Wenger explained: "There is no pact to play anyone in every game no matter what happens. Every individual has only one agreement

with the Club – to do everything necessary to win trophies." Likewise, the pairing of Adams and Campbell was preferred, to the exclusion of Martin Keown, and Ray Parlour to Edu in midfield.

A solidarity had been evident throughout the season that had been missing the previous year. Having lost seven times away from home in 2000/2001, Arsenal were unbeaten on the road this year. Their equilibrium proved to be too much for Chelsea, albeit that Chelsea enjoyed the upper hand for periods of the first hour, prior to Parlour's superb opening goal. Ranieri could only reflect: "When I arrived at Stamford Bridge, I heard much about lack of consistency. We have improved, but it isn't enough. We need new players." In contrast, Wenger was able to eulogise about the form of Robert Pires, Thierry Henry, Freddie Ljungberg and Dennis Bergkamp. At the heart of Chelsea's defence Marcel Desailly was in commanding form, but the midfield skills of Frank Lampard and Emmanuel Petit, behind an underpowered attack, failed to unhinge Arsenal. In the second half, Chelsea brought on John Terry in place of Celestine Babayaro, Terry having complained of feeling unwell in the morning. His arrival could not prevent Henry immediately creating a fine opening for himself, but goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini was equal to the moment. Gudjohnsen and Graeme Le Saux had shots as Chelsea began to press, but it was Parlour who broke the deadlock. Receiving a short pass from Wiltord, Parlour cut inside before striking the perfect shot just under the bar from outside the penalty area. Ten minutes later, Ljungberg broke away and at the end of a long run, evading Terry en route, struck the kind of shot against which Cudicini, though seeing the ball all the way, had no chance. This blow floored Chelsea and Arsenal's first trophy in four years was secure.

**Arsenal** Seaman, Lauren, Adams, Campbell, Cole, Parlour, Vieira, Ljungberg, Bergkamp (Edu), Henry (Kanu), Wiltord (Keown)

**Chelsea** Cudicini, Melchiot (Zenden), Gallas, Desailly, Le Saux, Gronkjaer, Lampard, Petit, Babayaro (Terry), Hasselbaink (Zola), Gudjohnsen

**Referee** M Riley

**Attendance** 73,963

**2003**

**Arsenal 1 Southampton 0**

This was the first FA Cup final to be played indoors, with the roof of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff closed. There was an instance, only 20 seconds from the start, when it would have been better had it been played behind closed doors: a foul by Southampton's defender Claus Lundekvam, attempting to exchange shirts with the flying Thierry Henry. The game had barely begun and the foul should have led to the award, if such a law existed, of a penalty goal and certainly a red card. We saw neither. Henry was denied a goal, and Arsenal's eventual victory was no more than deserved and expected. That early crude act on the field was in marked contrast to the sporting attitude of Southampton's yellowdecked supporters, who poured into Wales intent on enjoying the day, whatever the outcome.

Sadly for them, they were to be denied fulfilment not simply by the result but by the tactics devised by manager Gordon Strachan. These were to prevent Arsenal from playing football, their own attacks confined to an aerial search for the head of James Beattie. In defence of his strategy, Strachan asserted: "We had to play reality football, to cut out the frills and get the ball to Beattie as early as possible." Arsène Wenger, too, was slightly on the defensive after a less than euphoric victory, in a season when his team had conceded the League title to Manchester United by five points. "When two teams are poor, it is because the fear of losing is stronger than the desire to win," he said. "I sensed the pressure our players were under to win something, not having won the Championship. I can understand that everybody loves underdogs, but that makes it more difficult for the favourites. We go in there knowing that if we lose, it's disaster, and if we win we have merely done our job."

Seven minutes after being rugby-tackled at the start, Henry again came close. Drifting out to the right, then cutting inside, his shot was fumbled by Antti Niemi in goal, and Dennis Bergkamp's drive on the rebound was cleared off the line. Another thrilling gallop by Henry, Footballer of the Year, led to nothing, and at this stage Southampton theoretically remained in the hunt. There was almost a shock when 21-year-old Chris Baird, a surprise inclusion at right-back, had David Seaman scrambling to keep the ball out. As mutual frustration mounted, Martin Keown and Beattie were both booked for excessive challenges. Eight minutes before halftime came the decisive move. A through-pass by Ray Parlour found Henry on the edge of the penalty area. Aware of Bergkamp's peripheral run on the outside, Henry's pass dropped in his path to perfection and the Dutchman's reverse pass into the penalty area was hammered by Freddie Ljungberg against Lundekvam. From the rebound, Robert Pires unhurriedly swept the ball past Niemi. Ljungberg's ambition to be the first player to score in three successive finals was to be frustrated.

Southampton reeled, and further goals could have come before half-time. Afterwards, Southampton stuck to their limited, physical plan while Arsenal, to a degree riskily when holding such a narrow lead, went in search of embroidery. Leading the decorative display, on the day before his 34th birthday, was Bergkamp, and together with Pires and Henry he lifted the tone. Yet when the time came to collect the Cup from guest of honour Sir Bobby Robson, there were question marks remaining against Arsenal's ambitions in Europe. With Seaman on the edge of retirement, Oleg Luzhny looking suspect as a deputy centre-half and Bergkamp no more able to continue for ever than Seaman, Arsenal were going to need new players, were Wenger to fulfil the task of emulating Manchester United and Liverpool in Europe.

**Arsenal** Seaman, Lauren, Keown, Luzhny, Cole, Pires, Parlour, Gilberto, Ljungberg, Henry, Bergkamp (Wiltord)

**Southampton** Niemi (Jones), Baird (Fernandes), M Svensson, Lundekvam, Bridge, Telfer, A Svensson (Tessem), Oakley, Marsden, Ormerod, Beattie

**Referee** G Barber

**Attendance** 73,726

## 2005

### **Arsenal 0 Manchester United 0 (aet, Arsenal won 5-4 on penalties)**

The FA Cup Final of 2005 was the image in reverse of Arsenal's defeat by Liverpool four years earlier: Manchester United utterly won the day, but Arsenal won the Cup. United dominated from first to last, and were understandably distraught when, at the end of the first final to finish goalless, they conceded to their arch opponents on penalty kicks. An anguished Sir Alex Ferguson had seen his team finish behind second-placed Arsenal in the Premiership, nouveau riche Chelsea having rewarded their Russian plutocrat backer by winning the title for the second time, after a 50-year interval. Moreover, Wenger had confounded his rival manager, with whom verbal exchanges during five seasons had made regular headlines in the tabloids, by selecting a 4-5-1 formation, with Dennis Bergkamp as lone striker, never mind that he lacked pace and had little experience in the most forward role. This move was forced upon Wenger when Thierry Henry was ruled out with an Achilles injury. Nonetheless, United made

and missed more than enough chances to have won, long before Patrick Vieira, Arsenal's captain, shot home the winning penalty – a last gesture prior to his departure for Juventus.

Conditions were wet, set to favour those with speed and close control such as Cristiano Ronaldo, United's Portuguese winger, and he soon set up Paul Scholes for a header which flew just too high. Eventually the sun appeared, and with it Wayne Rooney began to emerge as the main danger to Arsenal. Ashley Cole was reduced to upending the 19-year-old prodigy, earning a yellow card. United appeared to have scored when a fierce shot by Rooney was blocked by Lehmann in goal and Ferdinand, following through, put the ball in the net. The linesman's flag rescued Arsenal. Jens Lehmann was constantly in action, saving from Rooney when palming over the bar and relieved when a volley by Rooney from Darren Fletcher's corner was just wide. In the second half, Arsenal continued on the back foot and had a further escape in the 67th minute when Rooney struck a post. Crucial to United's ultimate failure was Ruud van Nistelrooy's inability to finish decisively. Six minutes from time his close-range header seemed goalbound, only for Freddie Ljungberg, a substitute for Bergkamp, to head clear and nudge the game into extra time. A free kick by Robin van Persie might have put Arsenal ahead but Roy Carroll denied him, as did Lehmann at the other end with Scholes's stinging shot from only 10 yards out. Moments from the end of extra time, José Antonio Reyes was sent off for a second yellow card. Reyes became only the second player dismissed in a final, following Kevin Moran of Manchester United when playing Everton 20 years earlier.

The sequence of the ensuing penalties ran as follows: Van Nistelrooy, 1-0; Lauren, 1-1; Lehmann saves from Scholes, 1-1; Ljungberg, 1-2; Ronaldo, 2-2; Van Persie, 2-3; Rooney, 3-3; Cole, 3-4; Keane, 4-4; Vieira, 4-5. "I don't know about being a hero," Lehmann mused. "It was an intuitive save."

**Arsenal** Lehmann, Lauren, Touré, Senderos, Cole, Vieira, Fábregas (Van Persie), Gilberto, Pires (Edu), Reyes, Bergkamp (Ljungberg)

**Manchester United** Carroll, Brown, Ferdinand, Silvestre, O'Shea (Fortune), Scholes, Keane, Fletcher (Giggs), Ronaldo, Rooney, Van Nistelrooy

**Referee** R Stiles

**Attendance** 71,876



**10.**

# **European nights**

Arsenal have had some great adventures in Europe over the years, and they almost scaled the ultimate peak in 2005/2006 when they went all the way to the Champions League Final

# Arsenal in Europe

Arsenal in Europe: two cups, six finals, one manager and a 21st-century team. Not a bad haul from the continent considering the view, prevalent in the 1930s, that foreigners were beneath our interest on the football field. This was the Foreign Office advice to the English FA: "Beware in advance contests between British and foreign teams. Most of them are seeking victory in order to boost their political regimes." So England did not compete in that trifling little tournament known as the 1934 World Cup. It was won by Fascist-controlled Italy in their own country, boosting Benito Mussolini all the way into World War II. With blissful symmetry, Highbury closed the year that Italy won the World Cup again, only this time England had condescended to compete. Much good it did them, they were knocked out by Portugal in the quarter-finals. Three-quarters of a century had brought about a revolution in thinking. By the time the 2006 Italians were kissing the precious golden trophy, Arsenal's passion to conquer Europe was all-consuming. No longer were trips to the continent banned by the state. They were urgently required to develop a club's self-respect, bank balance and status in the eyes of the football world.

Arsenal's stock in Europe had never been higher than when they reached the Champions League Final. Years of under-achieving in Europe had been supplanted by a run that took the Gunners to the very brink of triumph against Barcelona in Paris, with a team that featured Frenchmen, Englishmen, Spaniards, two players from the Ivory Coast, a German, a Swede, a Brazilian and a Belorussian. What on earth would our 1930s Foreign Office minion make of such a world?

The Italians may have won the World Cup in 1934, but virtually every Englishman worth his flat cap knew that England were better than the Azzuri. At that point, somebody had a wonderful idea...

**Sue Mott**

**The Battle of Highbury**

## **Friendly, England 3 Italy 2, November 14, 1934**

"Friendly" in name only. Highbury had hosted a number of England matches at the time, but this was the greatest occasion to date. A visit from the team, with its Argentine ringers, that had beaten the Czechs in the World Cup Final in Rome to play England and conclusively prove that our home-grown boys were better than any foreign pretenders. The choice of Highbury as a venue was hugely appropriate as picked for the team were seven Arsenal players: Wilf Copping, Ray Bowden, George Male, Frank Moss, Ted Drake, Eddie Hapgood and Cliff Bastin. Not one of them was a sop to the locals, Arsenal really were that good in the autumn of 1934. "Good", of course, was only a figurative term when discussing the might of Copping; "good" did not quite cover the volcanic temperament, steel-hard boot nor cryptic intentions of the ferocious right back. Even the Italians might have heard of him.

But if the continentals were concerned about events to come, the England players had already been dismayed to discover the Italian team that turned up at Victoria Station were beautifully dressed, handsomely built, and being paid £150 a man for the win. The dismay evaporated in the urge to get amongst them. England professionals were paid the non-princely sum of £2 each for their own efforts in the national shirt. The disparity made them all the more desperate to prove their superiority. Not to mention the fact that Mussolini had promised every player a brand new Alfa Romeo car if they won, and even exemption from the dreaded national service. The Italian dictator was firm on the subject: "Good kicking is good politics." His final exhortation to the players as they left for London was: "You must make use of all your energy and willpower in order to obtain supremacy in all struggles on earth." Quite a team talk. So his players may have been a little upset to find themselves 0-3 down after 15 minutes, with two goals from Manchester City's Eric Brook and one from Drake, sweeping past the Italian goalkeeper, Carlo Ceresoli. But the goal tally was merely a fragment of the story.

The 'Battle of Highbury' before 54,000 spectators was living up to its name. Shortly after Brook's first goal, Italy's Monti (who had played for Argentina in the 1930 World Cup Final) was brutally tackled by Copping and suffered a broken foot. With no substitutes allowed in those days, the Italians were forced to play on with 10 and a bad case of lost temper. England captain Eddie Hapgood was sought out for reprisal and incurred a broken nose from a thump in the face. With typical English understatement he later described the situation. "It's a bit hard to play when somebody resembling an enthusiastic member of the

Mafia is scraping his studs down your leg." Note: he didn't even bother to mention the broken nose. He played on. With all due credit to the technical skill of the Italians, they came back with two goals from Giuseppe Meazzi. But their nerve failed them at that point. Never mind the goading of Mussolini, they clearly did not wish to cause any inconvenience to the one-man brick wall represented by Copping. The match ended with exhaustion and injury on both sides. Brook had received a hairline fracture to his elbow while Drake, Bastin, Bowden and Copping all needed treatment from the famous physio Tom Whittaker. For Copping the injuries were a badge of honour. He took his bandages stoically.

England was ebullient. Ha! "Here is irrefutable proof that the Italians are World Champions by name only," trumpeted the *Daily Mirror*. England, and the Arsenal seven, had preserved the honour of the nation, though not necessarily in an honourable fashion. According to Stanley Matthews, then 19 years old: "This was the roughest match I ever played in."

## **Arsenal 3 Moscow Dynamo 4**

### **Friendly, November 21, 1945**

There had been quite enough adventurousness in Europe for one decade, thanks to Adolf Hitler and his ally, Mussolini, but it was nevertheless decided that the British public, suffering postwar deprivation, would benefit from the visit of the greatest team in Russia to play an exhibition match against Arsenal. But the London club had yet to recover all their personnel who had been serving abroad in World War II. Of 46 registered professionals, 44 had been away in the services and not all had been retrieved by November. For example, Eddie Hapgood, due to captain the side, was stuck in Belgium.

So it was not, in reality, an all-Gunners side that faced the might of the touring Russians. There were one or two ringers, such as Stanley Matthews. The Moscow delegation were not best pleased by this arrangement. Going into the 'friendly' match, there were protestations from the Soviets. In the cold war that ensued, a fog came down, nature's own iron curtain, virtually obscuring the proceedings from a crowd of 54,000. The referee was criticised for allowing foul play to occur, the Russian captain came away with a mysterious black eye, which Ronnie Rooke was accused of giving him, and the Arsenal 'All-Stars' lost 4-3. As a forerunner of European nights to come – controversial, cross-cultural and sometimes (remember Lazio) just cross – it was the perfect precursor.

One small point. The match wasn't played at Highbury, still in commission as an ARP Station. On this occasion, Arsenal's resourceful manager, George Allison, borrowed a home from his neighbours and played the match at White Hart Lane, honorary Highbury for the afternoon.

Dynamo were a fine team: exotic, enigmatic (they didn't speak English) and prolific (they had just scored 10 against Cardiff City). The Russians had been allies during the War so there was no reason to assume hostilities, but there was a definite disgruntlement amongst the Soviet Sports Delegation that they should be faced by the cream of English football, not simply an Arsenal club side. Not only was Matthews playing at outside-right, but also Stan Mortensen of Blackpool at inside-left and the thundering Rooke, then of Fulham, though later of Arsenal, at centre-forward.

Allison, a smooth PR man, mounted the defence of the team's composition. Expressing his profound admiration of the Russian players, the Arsenal manager said he thought they would welcome a test against experienced players rather than have a "holiday jaunt" against young players who would not ordinarily have an 'earthly chance' of a place in the Arsenal first team. It was beautifully phrased. He said he was sure, absolutely positive, the Russians would prefer a sporting challenge rather than "toying with very immature material". Diplomacy won the day and the Russians agreed to play. An enormous crowd was anticipated, so great was the dearth of regular entertainments in post-War London, and then the fog came down. The play it obscured forever remains a mystery, except to those on the ball at the time.

The Times reported the mayhem in the deadpan voice of the post-War announcer. "Moscow Dynamo scored four goals to three in the fog when they met an Arsenal XI at Tottenham yesterday. There were 54,600 spectators, evidence enough of the drawing power of Russian football and Mr Allison's ingenuity in raising a side rich in names, if sadly lacking the teamwork once associated with Arsenal. Exactly how all seven goals were scored was not clear. Any rapid movement on the further side of the ground was ghostly and obscure. The fog occasionally lifted a little, only to fall again. Eventually the light began to fail too. A drizzle was not heavy enough to clear the atmosphere. The roars of cheering recorded local incidents, some undoubtedly clever, a few palpably against the rules. The Russian referee must have covered many miles to keep in touch with the play. Injuries and substitutions complicated the issue."

It was hardly the exhibition of thrills the organisers had planned, not least because no one could see it. But there was worse to follow. The 'Arsenal' team were accused of lacking sportsmanship by their Russian visitors, according to a translation from Radio Moscow. The Club reacted with amazement. Words such

as "astonished" and "never" were heard to ricochet around the Marble Halls. Allison contacted the Moscow Embassy. The Russian captain and Dynamo centre-half, Vitali Semichastny, had suffered not only a black eye but also a split tongue, both injuries apparently emanating from a collision with Rooke. Rooke himself sported a strip of plaster covering an inch-long gash at the back of his head. "As a guest of Arsenal, I would much prefer to say nothing," said Rooke.

Every manner of European tie would follow this dramatic opening: the victories, the maulings, the dogfights, the dance-fests, the surrenders, the battles, cold nights in far-flung Ukraine, steamy nights under floodlights at Highbury, two trophies, two defeats in finals on penalties ... and it all began in the fog at White Hart Lane.

## **Arsenal 3 Ajax Amsterdam 0**

### **Fairs Cup, semi-final, first leg, April 8, 1970**

Fast forward 25 years. Arsenal had been marooned in the First Division doldrums, neither relegated nor remarkable since the 1953 Championship. Managers had come and gone. Players of mediocre endeavour peopled the team. And yet, somehow, Bertie Mee, the Club's former physiotherapist, had arranged a team around solidarity and work ethic, and suddenly they seemed to be thriving. Only the year before they had been beaten in the League Cup final, by the mud, Don Rodgers and other members of Third Division Swindon Town. It was an horrific, humiliating defeat. Arsenal's players stumbled from the wreckage and vowed never to feel so terrible again. From that promise came genuine kinship and will. It would lead to their first touch of silver in 17 years, but first they had to play Ajax in the two-leg semi-final of the Uefa Cup prototype, the Inter Cities Fairs Cup. Ajax had reached the European Cup Final only the year before and contained the young Johan Cruyff, as well as fellow Dutch masters, Krol, Rjinders and Muhren. This was Dutch football's finest, the core of the team that created the concept of Total Football and were the spellbinding performers at the 1974 World Cup. Furthermore, this team, Ajax, would go on to win the European Cup three times in succession as testimony to their dominance of the continent. They were, in short, tough opposition.

Geoffrey Green, renowned sports writer of *The Times*, had a premonition. "Arsenal face a true test of the present and the future at Highbury tonight. Having recently reshaped their ideas and turned more to youth in the process – young home-grown players like Eddie Kelly and Charlie George for example –

they should now get an inkling of whether or not they are on the right lines." They were.

"By George, It's Great Arsenal!" trumpeted the Mirror the next morning. Charlie George scored twice – his first after 17 minutes – as Arsenal won 3-0. It must have been their lucky number that year. Key to the game was Frank McLintock's effective hampering of Cruyff and the replacement of the young Scot Peter Marinello by the physically sturdier and mentally tougher George "Geordie" Armstrong. The papers recorded the change with a blood-curdling lack of sentiment. "Marinello, his frail physique giving him the look of a rag doll among the burly Dutch defenders on the muddy wastes of Highbury, was substituted by Armstrong." (Ken Jones, the Mirror).

Those were the days when pitches at the end of the season resembled a motor-cross rally course – fine football did not necessarily flow, tackles did. Peter Storey was booked by the German referee. But then so was Cruyff. The outcome remained in the balance for over an hour, as a crowd of 46,000 suffered. The first goal from George, a speculative volley through a packed penalty area, created the slim margin that separated the sides. Cruyff was a menace, hence the armed guard around him. But the introduction of Armstrong was a tactical triumph. This was not a coincidence. The little Geordie winger went on to become one of the chief architects of Arsenal's 1971 Double. He attacked like a one-man Viking raid. Marinello, for all his comparisons to George Best, had only the long hair and weaving runs in common with the Manchester United genius. His fate was to watch the Arsenal Double unfold from the ghost town of the reserves.

But all this was later. Arsenal were still only leading 1-0 in a European semi-final. The springboard had yet to be sprung. But as Arsenal increased the tempo of their play, Jon Sammels hit a shot against the body of the Dutch goalkeeper, Gert Bals, and followed up the rebound. Seven minutes from time George Graham was brought down in the penalty area. It may seem incredible to us now that Arsenal's most sartorially-gifted manager of all time should allow himself to get muddy in the slough of an action-packed battle zone. This was the man who would shout to Frank McLintock across the pitch: "Mind the face, Frank. I'm going dancing tonight." Yet beneath the careless veneer of Stroller, there was a glimpse of the Scottish hard man who would go on to become an Arsenal manager, famous for his defence and his discipline. At least he wasn't afraid to enter the penalty area.

Accordingly, Charlie George converted the spot-kick. Three-nil and two from Charlie. They said it was his coming of age. It caught the attention of the great Cruyff himself, but most significantly it was enough – it would transpire,



after a 0-1 defeat in Amsterdam two weeks later – to take Arsenal all the way to their first Cup Final in European football. Seventeen years of hurt. Could it be ending at last?

## **Arsenal 3 Anderlecht 0**

### **Fairs Cup Final, second leg, April 28, 1970**

It was like a gathering storm. The sky was dark, with drizzle in the air and half of London seemed to be converging on Highbury hours before the evening kick-off, sneaking off early from work, rushing out of school to claim favoured spots on the terraces. Seats were already filling up. By the time the Arsenal bus arrived in Avenell Road, it could scarcely move through the throng. The team, none of whom had the experience of winning a major trophy, could sense the electricity in the air. This was anticipation to the power of 17, the 17 barren years since Arsenal had last won the League Championship.

This was Arsenal, the players, the management and the fans together, willing themselves back to life in the face of gigantic odds. Anderlecht, of Belgium, were already 3-1 ahead from the away leg of the Final of the European Inter Cities Fairs Cup. It could have been even worse as the Gunners had been 3-0 down when 19-year-old Ray Kennedy had come on for Charlie George and snatched a goal in the last minutes that meant a great deal more to Arsenal than "consolation". It was a lifeline. "Ray of Hope," the papers called it with their customary wit. But was it too little, too late? Captain Frank McLintock had stood in the post-match shower in Belgium contemplating his fifth successive final defeat as the water coursed over his head. Then he began to remember the serious inconvenience that Kennedy had caused to the Anderlecht centre-half, Julien Kialunda; he was 6ft 2in but "couldn't head the ball for a free haggis supper", he thought with his customary Scottish verve. That gave rise to another thought. "Bloody hell, we could win this!" he said to himself and then out loud to his immediately converted team-mates.

In the end, the gates closed on 51,612 spectators, many of them packed into the North Bank, a roaring wall of humanity. All of them watching the red and white through a grey gauze of heavy drizzle. The tension mingled with premonition to produce an atmosphere never felt before and never felt again in the old stadium. In the opinion of many who were there, it was the best night Highbury had ever staged, a spine-tingling contrast to the Leeds United game only four years earlier, when fewer than 5,000 turned up to watch. There was a

wait, an agonising wait, of 25 minutes, before the first goal was scored. The marksman was a tenacious young Scotsman, Eddie Kelly, still flirting with the reserve team but ideally suited to the conditions reminiscent of Glencoe in winter. Belief in the cause was renewed. Half time: still 1-0. Not enough. Seventy-fourth minute, still 1-0. Time ebbing away. But this was an Arsenal side possessed of heart, sinew and stamina in abundance, guided by a captain, sprung from the Gorbals, who was on a mission that night.

Everyone remembers the evocative gesture that McLintock made towards the North Bank at the start of the second half. He stood in front of them, their leader, and banged his fists together, urging them to fill the arena with noise and frighten the Belgians to defeat. If Arsenal the team were intimidating in those days, Arsenal the fans joined the fray. Despite the obvious threats of Jan Mulder and Paul van Himst, two hugely talented opponents, the twin threats of noise and desire began to weaken the will of Anderlecht. Arsenal needed to win by two clear goals and the Belgians' lead was looking fragile. In the 75th minute, George Graham supplied a superbly weighted through-ball to Bob McNab, the overlapping left fullback, who flighted a cross for mud-spattered John Radford to meet with a nod past the Belgian international goalkeeper, Jean Trappeniers. Two-nil. A minute later, three-nil. Jon Sammels, the scorer. Bedlam. Hysteria.

Arsenal were fighting the historical precedent of their previous failures. For McLintock, the last few minutes turned into hours as he teetered on the brink of a successful final after four desperate defeats at Wembley. The crowd, many of them new to the experience of glory-hunting, had to suffer agonies as they prayed for the final whistle. It came and with it the dancing conga-lines of celebrants, hoisting goalkeeper Bob Wilson on their shoulders, trampling the pitch and singing the praises of the team that would go on to make history the following season. McLintock was hoisted on to a set of jostling shoulders and a scarf flung round his neck. He was almost strangled as joyous supporters clung to either end of the decoration. Eventually he would receive the tall, strange, slim trophy that at last satisfied the pent-up hunger at Highbury for success to match their taunting rivals, Tottenham Hotspur, and rekindle the dreams that the Gunners could come again.

"Highbury housed the greatest knees-up in the history of British football last night when Arsenal ended 17 barren years by storming from behind to win the Fairs Cup from Anderlecht of Belgium," Peter Batt, of the *Daily Mirror*, reported. "More than 5,000 joyous fans joined their team in a lap of honour, engulfing their heroes in such jubilation that it looked as if some of them would have to drink their champagne in hospital."

## Arsenal 2 Lazio 0

### Fairs Cup, first round, second leg, September 23, 1970

They called it 'The Game That Died Of Fear'. Toothless. Incident-free. Dull. Just what the European authorities had ordered after a fully fledged street brawl between the clubs had concluded a provocative match at the Stadio Olimpico in the first leg of this first-round Inter Cities Fairs Cup tie. These were tough days in football, but not usually so combative that the riot police were called. Arsenal, the Cup holders, had largely contained their needling, muscle-flexing Italian rivals. Only a last-minute penalty by the Lazio centre-forward, Giorgio Chinaglia, saved a 2-2 draw for the Romans. Arsenal were furious about the award and even more livid with a foul by "Pino" Wilson, the Anglo-Italian sweeper (no relation to Bob), who kicked George Armstrong in the midriff, then collapsed theatrically to the turf feigning hurt.

The post-match communal banquet at a Rome restaurant was probably not, in retrospect, a terribly good idea. Both sides were nursing injury and umbrage. Both sides were drinking copious amounts of wine. When Ray Kennedy, still a teenager, went outside for a breath of air, the distrust took a more malign turn. Witness reports suggest that one of the Lazio defenders, Giuseppe Papadopulo, took this opportunity to further the argument by kneeing Kennedy in the groin, to which the English striker responded with vigour. Bob Wilson left the restaurant next and returned immediately. "There's a fight going on outside," said the former schoolteacher and felt the wind of passing team-mates charging to the affray. Frank McLintock and George Graham were the first on the scene. In the ensuing melee, George Armstrong was punched and flung against the team bus, John Woodward – some say it was Peter Marinello – was hurled through the air on to a parked car, young Italian women diners were screaming and at least one helmeted policeman, summoned to the scene, drew his revolver to try to restore calm (and Arsenal fans thought Leeds United were hard...).

Later Lazio accepted the blame for the diabolical fracas. A club director, Dr Guido Giambartolomei, was quoted in *The Sun*. "One could say it was largely our fault because with the dinner we provided some excellent wine." The Arsenal players, who suffered scratches, bruises and torn shorts, were eventually ushered onto their team bus and back to the team hotel where they were sworn to secrecy and told to go to bed. But the news got out, not least because McLintock and Graham sneaked out of their rooms and on to a party being thrown by Stan Flashman, the ticket tout. Their cuts and bruises provoked some intrigue and by

morning the English papers were full of the story.

When Lazio returned to Highbury for the second leg of the tie, they were a band of sweet-natured pacifists, thoroughly emasculated by dire warnings from 'disgusted of Switzerland' (ie the Uefa overlords). The match was played with virtually no physical contact at all, abetted by a stern East German referee, Rudi Glockner, who had been in charge of that summer's World Cup Final in Mexico. He booked five Italian players, but more in sorrow than in anger. The Italians were keeping their feet and elbows to themselves. Ballet replaced brawl, allowing John Radford and George Armstrong to head the two goals that took Arsenal into the next round. An audience of 53,013 had never seen such gentlemanly behaviour. Even Peter Storey, Arsenal's notorious enforcer, had the time to provide the crosses for the two goals. Free of his habitual bodyguard duties, the midfielder was demonstrating his more creative side.

Chinaglia, who would go on to play with Pelé and Beckenbauer at the New York Cosmos, was especially subdued. He had, after all, lost his teeth. Not to the fist of an Arsenal player, however. Rather to his dentist: he had just had his wisdom teeth out. The commentators of the time hardly knew what to make of it. "At times it was as though we had gone back nearly 90 years to the FA Cup Final of 1881 between Old Carthusians and Old Etonians. Yet probably there was more vim and vigour even when those gentlemen clashed," wrote Peter Wilson in the *Daily Mirror*.

Bertie Mee surveyed the two wildly differing ties and drew comfort. "Let me say that my players did not look forward to this second match with Lazio. They were apprehensive. But they accepted the straitjacket imposed and the real victory was gained in the 2-2 draw in Rome a week earlier. It was there that they were subjected to all kinds of provocation on the field, but, under orders, kept their heads and their tempers. They have come to learn that to retaliate under duress is to open the gate to the opposition. In fact, they began to grow up."

## **Arsenal 6 FK Austria Memphis 1**

### **European Cup, first round, first leg, September 18, 1991**

Back in the European Cup for the first time in 20 years, Arsenal had momentum behind them. There was something splendidly symmetrical about the occasion – the last time Arsenal had played in the Cup that decided who presided over Europe, they had been dumped out of the tournament by a George Graham own goal. This time, the very same man was their manager. If his players

remembered his role (although some of them weren't born then), they kept a diplomatic silence on the subject.

These were delicate times. Arsenal were the first English club to play in Europe's premier competition since the tragedy of the deaths at Heysel six years earlier. For the Liverpool fans' part in that black night, all English teams had been banned from all European competition, leaving them very little experience to call upon. The significance of the occasion clearly communicated itself to the players, already used to claiming prizes under the wily guidance of Graham. Winners of the League Cup in 1987 and the League Championship (dramatically) in 1989, the famous back four was already forming into a solid unit in front of goalkeeper David Seaman: Lee Dixon, Andy Linighan, Tony Adams, Nigel Winterburn, for this match. The attacking force included Alan Smith, Paul Merson and Anders Limpar. The Swede, on the wing, was the only foreigner in the side, thereby ensuring Arsenal easily complied with Uefa's rule that each club should field a maximum of four nonnative players. Back in the 20th century, native Englishmen were still in the majority. Alan Smith: what name could sound more English than that? The Brummie in the mould of Gary Lineker who made modesty an art form on and off the field. "Gary already has the Mr. Nice Guy title sewn up," he said realistically, in an interview before the match. "And I'm ready to concede he's the Housewife's Choice, too."

His self-deprecation, however, did not extend to the pitch and certainly not to the Austrian defence who played in deep purple, but not nearly as heavily as the namesake band. They were lightweight and disorganised, allowing Smudger (Smith) to score four, with Linighan and Limpar providing a bookend goal each. Liverpool scored six upon their own return to Europe the same week, and British optimists went wild with happiness.

"Quakey! Quakey! Six-goal Arsenal and Liverpool have woken up Europe – the shock of it must have bent the Eiffel Tower, crumbled the Acropolis, collapsed the Colosseum and flattened the rest of the Berlin Wall." That was *The Sun's* take on English football's divine dozen goals. The sackcloth was thrown off. "Where are they, those pessimistic pains-in-the-ass who constantly warn us that European teams are better than ours? Where are they this morning, the doubters who insist that English clubs' spirit, power and skill will be no match for foreign technique and tactics?"

They were, in fact, a mere five years down the line when Arsène Wenger began to build his teams around the might, finesse and youth of continental footballers. But no one could foresee such a thing back in 1991. This Arsenal team, plus Ian Wright, went on to win the domestic Championship, but European Cup success was not to be. After such a manly beginning, Arsenal lost in the

next round to Benfica. Losing in early rounds of the European Cup became something of a theme to the Club.

## **Arsenal 3 Sampdoria 2**

### **Cup Winners' Cup, semi-final, first leg, April 6, 1995**

It was a murky season. George Graham had been sacked in February and Stuart Houston was in temporary charge. News from Highbury frequently included reference to a couple of players with a variety of debilitating addictions. Tony Adams, the talismanic captain, had admitted to alcoholism and was facing his demons in typically combative fashion. Paul Merson was suffering multiple difficulties including alcohol, gambling and cocaine. This was no season to be chasing European glory ... and then they did.

Most memorable was the home leg of the semi-final against Sampdoria when Arsenal climbed into their Spitfires and mounted an aerial attack against the more sophisticated groundwork of their Italian opponents. The tactics were successful and significantly the scorer of two of Arsenal's goals was Steve Bould, the centre-half. The brace brought his tally to a mere seven goals in 239 games (League and Cup), a fair indication of his potential as a striker. Fortunately, Arsenal already had a useful front man. His name was Ian Wright. With a goal on the night, Arsenal's third, and one to follow in the away leg, the late-blossoming Londoner became the first player in European history to score home and away in every game from the first round to the final. Sadly, the run ended there. On a wretched night in Paris, Arsenal surrendered their dominance of the Cup Winners' Cup that stretched back two years and 17 games, losing to Real Zaragoza 1-2.

But that was later; first came the semi-final heroics. They were playing against a technically superior team, under the subtle guidance of a man we would come to know better as the England manager, Sven-Göran Eriksson. So the Arsenal dug-out was entirely unmolested and he had a nice line in understatement even then. Following, Arsenal's rousing if ugly first-leg victory, the Swede said: "The tie is 51 per cent in Arsenal's favour. After all, we cannot eat to be taller in one week."

He meant that Arsenal had rained attacks on Sampdoria down from the skies as opposed to silkily threading balls through to feet. What else could they do? A team that featured John Hartson, Stefan Schwarz and David Hillier was hardly going to mistake itself for Brazil. They played to their strengths: character, will,

determination, all driven along by the majestic captaincy of Adams. Attilio Lombardo, Sampdoria's theatrical counter-attacker, had already noticed Adams. "After playing Adams, I could come back looking like a mummy," he apparently divulged to the British tabloids, suggesting that contact with the Arsenal captain could provoke a need to be swathed in bandages. It yielded them the happy headline: "Attilio The Mum".

Lombardo must have been prescient. Adams was indeed a force, bonding his team together by cussed English will. The same could not always be said of the defence. Following Bould's double strike, the Italians regrouped after half-time and scored twice through their darting Serbian, Vladimir Jugovic. On both occasions, Arsenal defenders were beaten while waving their hands for offside like schoolchildren urgently needing the bathroom. Old drills die hard. George Graham was long gone, but the Arsenal offside trap he left behind had persisted like a ghost, a tribute to his disciplinary focus. Fortunately, he had left something else in his wake. Wrighty. It was the 69th minute and Merson picked up possession in midfield, clipping a wonderful pass through to Wright who outstripped the defending Marco Rossi before flicking the ball over the advancing goalkeeper, Walter Zenga. His joy, as ever, was unconfined.

"I'm driven by people telling me, I'm not an international finisher," Wright said afterwards. "I hate being told that." He reinforced that opinion in the second leg, scoring with his one chance on the night in Genoa. Arsenal were through? Not quite. Having won 3-2 at home, Arsenal lost 2-3 in Italy. The stalemate would be broken by David Seaman. Despite a set of painfully broken ribs, the Arsenal goalkeeper saved three Sampdoria penalties, from Jugovic, fellow Serbian Sinisa Mihajlovic and Lombardo. "Well played, Spartacus," said Adams to him casually as they returned to the dressing room.

## **Arsenal 5 Deportivo La Coruña 1**

### **Uefa Cup, fourth round, first leg, March 2, 2000**

Arsène Wenger was long into his reign. Despite his cosmopolitan birth, the international nature of the team, and the continental philosophy he espoused, Arsenal's recent record in Europe was disappointing. Blame Wembley (partly). For two seasons, the Gunners' campaigns had been transferred across the city from the intimate confines of Highbury to the wide open space and seating of the soon-to-be-condemned national stadium. Crowds came, goals did not. Wenger's record to date was: Uefa Cup, two first-round knock-outs; Champions League,

dismissal after the first group stage.

The 1999/2000 season began the same way – dismissal from the Champions League after the first group stage. But the consolation prize was a place in the Uefa Cup. Arsenal grasped this wooden spoon like a lifeline and Deportivo La Coruña, La Liga leaders at the time, were the team to suffer this surfacing of renewed vigour and spirit. The team on this night was still half-British: David Seaman in goal, Lee Dixon and Martin Keown in defence. But, as a sign of the coming times, the forward-going thrust was an international affair. Three Frenchmen (Emmanuel Petit, Gilles Grimandi, Thierry Henry), two Dutchmen (Marc Overmars, Dennis Bergkamp), one Swede (Freddie Ljungberg) and Oleg Luzhny (Ukraine) plus Silvinho (Brazil) concluding the make-up of the defence.

Wisely, Arsenal had moved this part of their Euro campaign back to Highbury and perhaps relocation to the historic venue inspired their torrent of goals. Nothing else could account for Dixon, the right back, being hailed as a striker five minutes into the match. He was captain for the night, in the absence of Tony Adams, and scored, in the approved Adams' fashion, with his head. This was the signal for a rampage, abetted by Deportivo's reduction to 10 men after a shove on Grimandi. Henry scored twice and Nwankwo Kanu redeemed himself a little for returning to London late after the African Cup of Nations with an irresistible meander through the Deportivo defence. The night was finished in typical Bergkamp style. While waiting to be substituted by Ray Parlour, who was having trouble getting his shirt over his curly-locked head, the Dutchman took a swift free kick within sight of goal and, as though primed by a deity (which some would argue it was) it duly took a deflection into the net.



# The road to Paris: Champions League 2005/2006

If someone had said, midway through Highbury's last season that five months later Arsenal would be within 14 minutes of winning the Champions League final against Barcelona with 10 men, having beaten Real Madrid and Juventus en route, they would have been solemnly led away and measured up for a strait-jacket.

Arsenal in winter were a team with a makeshift back four, no Ashley Cole, part-time Dennis Bergkamp and defeats mounting up in the Premiership against Middlesbrough, Bolton Wanderers, Newcastle United, West Bromwich Albion, Chelsea (home and away), not to mention a brace of Cup traumas, FA and Carling, four days apart, against Bolton and Wigan respectively. This, by Arsène Wenger's exalted standards at least, was a disaster.

Arsenal in the spring were boarding the plane bound for Paris and potential immortality. What went right?

It was always Wenger's belief that Arsenal had European greatness in them, but sometimes the Arsenal manager was ahead of his time: 2001 was a little premature. That year his ambition was almost immediately foiled, with Arsenal going out of the Uefa Champions League at the second group stage, losing twice to Deportivo La Coruña of Spain.

It was a recurring story. Arsenal's history in the elite competition of Europe was a catalogue of absence, dashed hopes and ultimate failure. In nine campaigns, including the old European Cup, they had reached the quarter-finals twice. That was it. Other English teams, even highly unlikely ones such as Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa, had managed to perch at the European summit (including Liverpool, five times, and Manchester United in 1968 and as part of their historic Treble in 1999). But Arsenal, with one of the greatest managers in Europe, a continental attitude and a largely foreign-born team, had only to see a European hurdle to fall over it. It began to look like an allergy.

There was no reason to suppose, as the 2005/2006 season began to take shape, that this European campaign would be any different. If anything, the

omens were worse. Second game of the season: a defeat to Chelsea at Stamford Bridge. Next away game: a 1-2 reversal at Middlesbrough. Then a goalless draw at Upton Park against West Ham United and a shocking defeat to an eventually relegated West Bromwich Albion. Arsenal could scarcely buy an away point. In fact, their first win away from home was on Saturday November 19, 2005, 3-2 against Wigan Athletic, by which time something funny was going on in Europe. The Arsenal of old did brilliantly in the Premiership but squandered opportunities in Europe. This time it was the other way round. Arsenal's dismal league form was being counterbalanced by European invincibility. Three days after the Wigan game, Arsenal travelled to FC Thun of Switzerland and beat them in a bitterly cold Alpine wind thanks to an 88th-minute Robert Pires penalty. That made five wins out of five matches. Arsenal had qualified for the Champions League knock-out stage as group winners.

No one knew what to make of it. Was that rumbling noise around Highbury merely the trains rattling into Drayton Park station, or was a slumbering giant that constituted Arsenal in Europe finally being roused into action? Clearly, crossings to the continent were not always doom-laden. Arsenal's record in the old Fairs Cup involved one glorious night at Highbury in 1970 when Anderlecht of Belgium provided the opposition and one mazy run to the Uefa Cup Final in 2000 when early ejection from the Champions League gave Arsenal a consolatory role in the lesser competition. They lost on that occasion to Galatasaray, on penalties. The European Cup Winners' Cup had been another hunting ground: three finals with one victory, against Parma when Alan Smith scored the lone goal in 1994. But Uefa in their wisdom had now scrapped that particular tournament, leaving fewer avenues paved with silver for Arsenal to explore.

Despite those occasional glimmers of hope, Arsenal were under-achievers in Europe. It was a fact. A galling, inexplicable, historically accurate fact. No one at Highbury in the first few months of the season could have guessed that a monumental culture change was brewing. There is something cumulative about a cup run. Something that begins with tiny incidents, apparently trivial and random, which somehow fuse to build momentum. When Arsenal played FC Thun on September 14 at Highbury, their opening Champions League game of the season, in front of 34,498 fans barely back from their summer holidays, who knew that momentum was building? Manuel Almunia was in goal. The back four – Lauren, Sol Campbell, Kolo Touré and Ashley Cole – had no idea of the upheavals to come. Eventually, three out of the four would be sidelined with long-term problems. The strikers were Robin van Persie and José Antonio Reyes. No Thierry Henry. He was injured.

Even so, it should have been a perfectly straightforward evening. FC Thun were Swiss minnows, a former amateur third division outfit. But it was not a straightforward evening at all. Van Persie was sent off for a raised foot, according to the Polish referee, and Arsenal played the entire second half with 10 men. The score as the final whistle approached was 1-1. No longer was there a holiday atmosphere in the stadium. Highbury was grumbling with foreboding. The usual European trauma seemed to be looming. Then, in the dying seconds, Dennis Bergkamp, on as a 72nd-minute substitute for Cesc Fabregas, collected the ball on the penalty spot. He twisted, slipped, recovered, left his marker sprawling behind him and calmly struck the ball past the Swiss goalkeeper, Eldin Jakupovic. A last-gasp classic. Perhaps that was the moment when the heavy door to the European wonderland shifted open a fraction. How appropriate that the push should be applied by the Dutchman whose arrival at Arsenal in 1995 coincided with the onrush of a whole new ball game at Highbury, sophisticated and spectacular.

If Arsène Wenger was the creator, Bergkamp was the catalyst and on that Highbury night in September his magical alchemical qualities were never more valuable. Arsenal had played one, won one. Wenger had been lamenting for years that something peculiarly demotivating happened to his team every time a foreign referee blew his whistle. It was an overstatement. There were moments of high achievement – the 5-1 victory against Inter Milan in Italy in November, 2003, being the most sensational example – but a long run of European form had proved elusive.

"It is a real regret to me that Arsenal have not yet played to their full potential in the Champions League. We need to establish the Club as one of the top teams in that League. Historically, that's what the Club is missing. You are not a great team until you have done that." Wenger spoke of his frustrations in October 1999, following a season when they lost in the first group stage of the Champions League to a combination of Lens, Panathinaikos and Dynamo Kiev. The theorists found all manner of reasons for Arsenal's relative failure. That Bergkamp would not fly, thereby leaving their most imaginative playmaker either at home or suffering car-journey fatigue as he rattled along autobahns in pursuit of distant stadiums. That playing two seasons at Wembley was an unmitigated disaster because the away teams were inspired by the iconic location. That Arsenal were inexperienced in Europe (despite most of their players having been born there). That the cold weather in eastern Europe in the winter had brought out the gloves and the worst in the forward line.

Few onlookers, therefore, expected much reward from Arsenal's visit to Ajax, four times European champions, when they crossed into Holland at the end

of September with a conspicuously makeshift team. Henry was still missing with a groin injury. Bergkamp and Gilberto were injured. Jens Lehmann and Van Persie were suspended. Campbell was captain. The bench consisted of Quincy Owusu-Abeyie, Gaël Clichy, Pascal Cygan, Alexander Song, Arturo Lupoli, Emmanuel Eboué and Mart Poom, none of whom was exactly a household name even in the countries they hailed from.

Freddie Ljungberg scored in the second minute, a precious goal. It was Arsenal's 100th goal in the Champions League and, incidentally, Freddie's only goal until the penultimate game of the Premiership season. From the vantage point of that slender lead, Arsenal defended stoutly until Reyes drew a penalty in the second half, converted by Robert Pires. So incensed were the Dutch by the referee's decision, two of their players, the captain and the goalkeeper, were booked. In the fullness of their ire, they pulled a goal back. But the final whistle blew on a rare Arsenal away victory. Wenger told the world he was "cautious" about qualifying for the knock-out phase of the competition. As well he might be.

Then came the firework display from one man. Arsenal assembled for their away trip to Sparta Prague under pressure. The previous Saturday they had lost to West Bromwich Albion, there was talk of a lack of togetherness in the locker room and criticism of the sale of Patrick Vieira to Juventus. "I don't feel it was a big mistake," Wenger was forced to explain. A few months later, he would prove it. But in October the scrape of knives being sharpened was discernible over the drone of the plane engines to the Czech Republic. Henry had been called into the squad after his injury break of 38 days. He was expected to play perhaps 30 minutes in the second half. But the plans had to be hastily revised as Reyes was crumpled by a matador's tackle (which broke the Spaniard's rib) as early as the 15th minute. Reyes off, Henry on. Within six minutes the Frenchman had scored, a goal of breathtaking and bewitching ingenuity. A forward pass from Touré. Henry cushioned the ball with the back of his heel, swivelled and fashioned a shot with the outside of his right boot, so imbued with sidespin that the Sparta Prague goalkeeper Jaromir Blazek was reduced to flummoxed spectator. To emphasise his mastery, and resistance to rust, Henry added Arsenal's second with 16 minutes remaining.

It was significant. With that simple tap he became Arsenal's leading goalscorer of all time with 186 goals, overhauling the record of the redoubtable Ian Wright. A goal, a win and history all in the same European evening.

Wenger paid this tribute: "The record is something exceptional and you have to respect that he beat it in a relatively short time. He was not especially a goalscorer at the start of his Arsenal career. He was an all-round player, not

hunting in the box for goals. It is nearly inexplicable that a guy who is not really interested only in scoring goals can score so many. He'll go down in the history not only of Arsenal but of football." Henry himself said this. "You can never doubt my commitment on the pitch. When I step on it, I play with my heart." He chose his words carefully. Later he would admit that he had been driven by pent-up anger after critics had questioned his loyalty to Arsenal. "I had so much anger that I needed to help the team. I think I answered people who questioned whether I had the desire to play for Arsenal because every time I wear the shirt I play with my heart and total commitment. I think I proved that in beating the record, because I only had one day of training. I watched the defeat at West Brom on television and I was biting my nails. It's hard when you see an opportunity when you think you could hit the back of the net and you're not there. It's very frustrating." Only earlier that day had Wenger and he decided that he would even travel to Prague.

"To be honest, I didn't feel ready," continued Henry. "But it's strange because sometimes you feel ready and you're not. Football is a strange sport. As soon as I stepped on to the pitch I was determined to give my best." He did. Quantifiably his best. So began one of the subplots of the season, the saga of Henry's future. Would Arsenal's greatest player of his era, one of the finest strikers in Europe, the French recordbreaker and Hampstead's most famous resident, trade in his love of Arsenal and London for foreign fields, specifically Spain, where Barcelona were openly longing for his services and Real Madrid were promising to convert him into a galactico? It was a plot that tightened its grip on the watching masses with every passing game and would find resolution in the aftermath of the greatest European adventure in Highbury's history. And it began there, in the Letna Stadium, Prague. Henry was on the Euro prowl again.

Arsenal qualified easily for the knock-out stage of the Champions League. A 3-0 defeat of Sparta Prague in front of a crowd of 35,155 at Highbury, their fourth successive European win of the season, elicited high praise from the opposing coach. "The quality of Arsenal is amazing," said Stanislav Griga, after a 25-yard dipping, swerving volley from Henry put the home team ahead, augmented by a brace from Van Persie in the final 10 minutes. Griga was not the only one. There were many "Amazeds of Highbury" by December when a 0-0 draw with Ajax concluded the group stage. This was a whole new ball game. Easy qualification, an upbeat European mood, even whispered mentions of the venue for the final. Stade de France, Paris. A beautiful city in the spring. And Henry's birthplace, more to the point. "Destiny" was beginning to come into the conversation.

However, seasoned Arsenal supporters shook the idea from their mind. There

was a long road ahead before such a fantasy. First, there was Real Madrid. It was hardly a Christmas present. Arsenal had the winter break to contemplate an away trip to the Bernabeu on February 21 and it would not have been with any great confidence. Real, European champions a record nine times, were packed with romance, tradition and galacticos. If the fans had misgivings, some players were even worse. "I watched Robinho, Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo combine [against Real Zaragoza in the Spanish Cup] and, believe me, any club can lose in Madrid. Sometimes all you can do against them is pray. With their six or seven world-class players, you can be destroyed." This was Robert Pires giving not exactly a team talk. Meanwhile, Arsenal's domestic season had stuttered. While Madrid were winning their last six League games in succession, the Gunners had lost as many in their last 11 encounters, including cup defeats against Wigan and Bolton.

Wenger, about to board the plane at Luton Airport, told the press that "never" had the odds been so stacked against his Arsenal team. But he remained defiant. "In the end, it is down to how much we believe we can do it. I believe we can do it. It is time."

The prescience of the words still reverberate. "It is time." So it was. The result was nigh that would radically alter the direction of Arsenal's season. They walked out of the tunnel in Madrid the underdogs. Very much the underdogs, as the flash bulbs popped and the anthems played. The Arsenal team that took the field against a worldrenowned team of all-stars – David Beckham, Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, Robinho – consisted of a newly-constructed defence: Eboué, Philippe Senderos, Touré, Mathieu Flamini, collectively known as "Lambs to the Slaughter", aged 22, 21, 25 and 21 respectively. Fabregas and Alexander Hleb, youth and inexperience, featured in midfield, while Henry was to play the lone striker role. Pressure was on the captain. "Wenger Needs The Old Henry", said the headlines. Suggestions were abroad that he did not rise to the European occasion. It was also supposed that one more demoralising defeat could have a devastating effect on the injury-ravaged side. "The only good thing is how quickly the young players have had to mature," said Wenger. "I believe we are close to having another great side." Critics scoffed.

The scoffing ceased the moment Henry scored the lone goal of the game, slaloming through his Spanish opponents as though they were planted in the ground and he alone blessed with a set of skis. "We did everything to try to stop Henry," said Álvaro Mejia, the Real defender. "We tried to push him, pull him and we tried to kick him, but nothing worked. He was unstoppable. I've never seen anything like it. We tried to stop him, but he just came away carrying the ball. First Ronaldo tried to get him, but didn't. Then I tried to tackle him, but he

went over the top of me. Guti was next and he tried to take him down, but Henry rode the challenge and kept his feet. He is so strong." A Spanish newspaper expressed the feeling of the nation. "Henry was the galactico. Ronaldo was invisible."

So the sub-plot – Henry's future – reared its head even in the moment of triumph. Wenger was wily enough to remind his striker of his responsibility. "I told you Thierry would produce. What more can you say about him? I hope the ability that our young team showed will convince him to stay. For them to grow it's important that their leader stays with them." "Their leader" was suitably impressed. "It's a long time since I've seen an Arsenal team play like that. We were brilliant defensively and the most important thing is that we weren't scared to play," said Henry in the euphoric aftermath. The second leg against the Spanish side at Highbury was the most glorious stalemate ever seen on the premises. For a team once renowned for boring draws, here was the nil-nil antithesis. So much to admire: indestructible Lehmann in goal, a formidable young defence in front of him and Pires almost scoring in the dying minutes from 60 yards. Raul hit the post for Real. It was close, vibrant, absorbing, captivating action and never has nil looked so lovely. Furthermore, Arsenal were through to the quarter-finals. Juventus awaited. One of the greatest club names in European football, with glittering stars like Lilian Thuram, Emerson, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, David Trézéguet littered throughout the team. Their defence had been assembled at a cost of £100 million. Arsenal's had cost £5 million. Patrick Vieira would be returning for the first time since his £13.7 million transfer in the summer of 2005. It could be an emotional occasion for the former Arsenal captain. It was. In a bad way. Juve imploded, finishing the match with nine men after Mauro Camoranesi and Jonathan Zebina had been dismissed in the final four minutes, raging against the dying light of their European campaign. Fabregas, aged 18, so thoroughly upstaged Vieira that the crowd who had given their Old Boy a standing ovation were now almost moved to pity. But the moment, the defining moment of the game, involved a different Frenchman, for once not Henry, but his compatriot Pires.

Chopper Pires? Hardly. Famed for lightfootedness that bordered on the effete, the Reims-born forward was not known as the most emphatic of tacklers. But something on this portentous night affected him, inspired him, as never before. Vieira was just launching into one of his purposeful runs forward when suddenly Pires loomed into the picture, sliding in with a strong-footed tackle and stealing the ball away with his feet. Highbury froze in disbelief. Perhaps the Juventus defence was similarly stunned. Henry received the ball, moved it on to Fabregas, who classically dropped a shoulder and slid the ball past Gianluigi

Buffon in goal. If there was a Move of the Season, that was it, combining the impossible, the prodigious and the omnipotent. It was over for Juventus. Two-nil at Highbury, Henry naturally adding a second, followed by a 0-0 draw in the Stadio Delle Alpi took Arsenal further than they had ever been before. That draw helped the team to their eighth consecutive Champions League clean sheet, beating a record previously held by AC Milan. Arsenal were inching towards Wenger's burning ambition. "The best team in Europe," he had said. Not yet, but many famous names were lying in their wake. "Two months ago no one expected this," said Wenger with every justification. "I'm really proud," added Henry. "That's the kind of history we were trying to make. I'm a winner and when you wear the Arsenal jersey winning is in your blood." Did that mean he would stay? No one knew.

Arsenal now faced Villarreal, a Spanish dark horse hitched to the playmaking wagon of Argentine maestro Juan Román Riquelme. Underdogs no more, the Londoners took to the field at Highbury as favourites. It did them no favours. Both games, home and away, were a nerve-ridden patchwork of misplaced passes and snatched half chances. Tantalisingly close to a date in Paris, inexperience seemed to hinder the confidence of both sides to go forward. After three hours of play, only one goal separated the sides, that one crucial goal coming, perhaps aptly, from the boot of stout defender, Touré, who would go on to represent the Ivory Coast in the World Cup that summer. Undoubtedly the highlight of the match was the appearance of a stray grey squirrel on the pitch in the second half. It streaked along the goalline, wilfully disobeying the gestures of park keeper Lehmann and, to a huge roar, eventually escaped back into the crowd. With that gruelling victory, illuminated by wildlife, Highbury said goodbye to European nights. The floodlights were doused for the last time. Wenger was asked if he would go into the second leg on a negative, defensive basis. He joked that he wished good luck to anyone trying to make Ljungberg, Fabregas and Hleb think defensively. But, in fact, his team at El Madrigal, the compact ground in northern Spain that hosted the second leg of the semifinal before 23,000 passionate supporters, was uncharacteristically, painstakingly cautious. It did not suit them. It took Villarreal until the 88th minute before they made their breakthrough, though. They were awarded a penalty after Clichy, playing his first match as a ninth-minute substitute after a five-month absence with a broken foot, fouled José Mari. Riquelme placed the ball ominously on the spot. Lehmann, bullish, defiant, squared up to the moment. The Argentine shot weakly, the German dived to his left, the ball was parried away, Arsenal were transformed. They were European Champions League finalists.

Just one jarring moment from the Villarreal match lingered on. The second



half had been delayed by a pitch invader who confronted Henry with a Barcelona shirt already bearing his name. It caused alarm in the minds of every Arsenal supporter. Now everyone at Arsenal faced the stupendous irony of meeting in the final the very team who were threatening to wrest their greatest striker and talisman away to Spain, the very same Barcelona FC. Barcelona, 18 times the national champions of Spain, 24 times the Spanish Cup winners, European Champions 1992, four-time winners of the European Cup Winners' Cup, three times the Fairs Cup, residents of the stupendous Nou Camp with its seating for 100,000 devotees and employers of probably the world's greatest player, the smiling Brazilian, Ronaldinho. This was the obstacle around which Thierry and his team would have to dance to take away the "Cup with Big Ears", the monumental Champions League trophy. They could do it. Wenger did not outwardly waver in his belief. "I always believed there was something special in this team. It's a combination of humility, hunger, strength, togetherness and talent."

So Arsenal fans mounted their benign invasion of Paris by air, sea, road and rail, a trail of yellow and redcurrant emanating from London and pausing in Parisian cafés for heartening prematch beers. Very little deterred their optimism, certainly not the mortal brilliance of Samuel Eto'o, Ludovic Giuly, Deco, Edmilson. No point admiring the brilliance of other little stones when, in Henry, they had the coveted Koh-i-noor diamond. Slowly, in drizzle, they made their way to St Denis, pulled by the gravity of the Stade de France and the uber-match that awaited them. They cheered when an Arsenal supporters' bus opened a door to reveal Charlie George in the front seat. He had been around the Club a long time, and was now here as first-hand witness to the most prestigious night in Arsenal's history. Charlie gave a confident thumbs-up sign and the bus moved on.

Inside the stadium, stalwart ranks of Arsenal supporters in yellow faced the red-and-blue cacophony of Barcelona. Flags, banners, hooters, scarves, the Catalans had come equipped for a souvenir war. They waved their scarves around their heads like lassoes. The Londoners, less demonstrative, just sang.

The damp air crackled with electric anticipation, that of 80,000 people in the arena and, conservatively, a billion watching on television. This match had been long awaited, billed as the two most beautiful club teams on the planet vying for Europe's greatest prize.

That plan was crumpled and consigned to the dustbin of history within 18 minutes of the kick-off. Two crucial characters made chronic mistakes and the game, as a spectacle, would never recover. The first offender was, of all players, Lehmann, Arsenal's penalty hero of the semi-final. Confronted by an onrushing

Eto'o, bereft of defensive cover, the German goalkeeper elected to sacrifice himself rather than concede the likely opening goal. Perhaps there was no calculation in the histrionic dash that felled the Cameroon forward with a twofooted tackle. Perhaps it was just a moment of eccentric, red-blooded, panic. Either way, the result was devastating.

Enter the second culpable character, referee Terje Hauge, of Norway. Instead of allowing Barcelona to play on, awarding the advantage to Giuly, who promptly turned the ball into the net, he halted proceedings to dismiss the errant German. The Barca "goal" was struck from the record and Arsenal were down to 10 men with 72 minutes remaining against the earth's finest exponents of attacking football. Manuel Almunia, Arsenal's reserve goalkeeper, looked thunderstruck as he struggled into his jersey. Lehmann, as grey as his shirt, was pulled away from the stage as though in chains at the back of a tumbrel. It was a wretched plight and the ruination of a conventional match. Arsenal should have been doomed. Instead, they took the lead in the 37th minute, again courtesy of a curious refereeing decision. Fullback Eboué was generously judged to have been fouled by Carles Puyol. Most neutrals would have called the clash in Puyol's favour. But gift horses are welcome sights on the battlefield and Henry floated the free kick into the penalty area. One head rose higher than the rest as the ball arced toward the goal area. Decisive, brazen, accurate, not adjectives liberally applied to England central defender Campbell since his abrupt departure from Highbury midway through a Premiership defeat to West Ham in February. Campbell's clanging header opened the scoring. Arsenal fans marvelled at the twist of fate that cast him in the roll of saviour and prepared for the oncoming siege. It did not quite happen. Ronaldinho was uncharacteristically subdued and, despite their attacking superiority, Barcelona were prowlers not predators. Arsenal's Spanish stand-in, Almunia, brought on for the luxurious Pires in the 20th minute, was manfully repelling every Catalan raid.

The minutes ticked by. Arsenal's emotions had rolled through shock, horror, joy, dawning hope. Then Henry had a chance that could, perhaps should, have put the outcome beyond doubt. He scuffed his shot instead. Fickle destiny had just changed her mind. The heroic defence tried to hold firm but, with the entrance of the former Celtic striker, Henrik Larsson into the fray, the backline was finally overwhelmed. Larsson was the heartbreaker, making two goals, one for Eto'o in the 77th minute – which Arsenal fiercely contested as offside – and the killer for fellow substitute Juliano Belletti in the 81st. Luck had deserted Almunia. He was beaten at the near post for the equaliser, the ball went through his legs for the winner. Dream over in four minutes.

The aftermath. When a Brazilian tough guy like Gilberto stands and cries in

full public view, yellow shoulders heaving with the weight of the emotion, it is possible to understand the scale of Arsenal's immediate despondency. To last so long, all the way to the 77th minute, against so great a set of odds with a second-string goalkeeper and just 10 men, was a cruel fate for those players. Arsenal had been taunted with hope and affirmation then, in a pop of flash bulbs and a riot of Catalan celebration, it was gone. Wenger's vision of his team was snatched away before his eyes. But, in truth, the transplanted Highbury masses, the 20,000-plus supporters seated in serried ranks behind the goal that Henry had attacked in the second half, were far from disconsolate themselves. The adventure had been nobly pursued. Barcelona were, on the night, perhaps one European superpower too many for the young Arsenal side. The fans waited a while to embark on their night out in Paris, waited to demonstrate their support for their team in one last emotional wave. This team had just climbed a mountain and, if the flag was fluttering a few feet short of the summit, they had still come a long way from base camp with their domestic travails, injuries, controversies and the desperate promotion of callow teenagers. What mattered now, even more than the result, was the fate of the expedition leader. Henry. What was Thierry going to do now?

Looking anxiously for signs of a mind elsewhere, Arsenal saw instead a captain caring for his men. He walked round his team, flattened with fatigue and disappointment, he put an arm round their shoulders, talked gently in their ears, ruffled a head of hair. Then he turned and walked toward the fans. He went to them with his arms outstretched. Goodbye? Never mind the trauma of the score, that might have been the moment that the Arsenal fans broke down in tears. But soon the newswires were chattering with a different story. Henry was distraught. His treatment by the Barcelona defenders had outraged him. Kicked many times before, this time he was incandescent. Wenger was likewise angry, predominantly with the performance of the referee, not for his dismissal of Lehmann, but for his tolerance of Barcelona's close attention to Henry's vulnerable shins. This view was not a universal one. Many observers would have pointed to Giuly's disallowed goal and to Eboué's fortune as evidence of the referee's behaviour favouring Arsenal. Either way, it was all over now.

"Robbed!" roared the English headlines the next morning, quoting the Arsenal captain. "It was already hard enough without the ref helping them ... he should have worn a Barca shirt. Barcelona are a great team, but they also had a lot of help. No disrespect to Barcelona, but we were the better team when it was 11 v 11." Words which carried huge significance. Would Henry, so cocooned in reverence, affection and admiration in north London, really switch to a Catalan environment of which he was prepared to be so critical. He must have looked at the Barcelona fans, the vast, colourful contingent of noise and drums and Latin

extroversion and been tempted. Then he missed that 69th-minute opportunity, going through on goalkeeper Victor Valdes, and instead of abuse from the mouths of Arsenal fans, he received undying loyal support. "Thierry Henry, Thierry Henry," they sang in unison. Perhaps something as simple, as complete, as that was the turning point.

"People want to give you a label as a footballer where it's all money, money, money. But there is love, there's emotion, real emotion, real love. After Wednesday I couldn't let them down." Henry's words, two days after the final, when he told the world he had signed a new contract. He would be staying with Arsenal. Cue celebrations.

Of all the moments in Highbury's farewell season, the one that said "Hello again, Henry" may have been the most profound. Highbury, the springboard, the backdrop, the catalyst to Arsenal's most memorable march in Europe, was given one final precious gift. Henry's eloquence on the occasion was moving: "The team showed me they would have done anything to beat Barcelona. They reassured me in that performance how much they wanted it. I won't lie. I thought about leaving, but I think with my heart and my heart told me to stay."

Henry looked back through the seven years since his move from Juventus to Arsenal, virtually unknown and speaking no English. Since then he had claimed two Premiership titles, three FA Cups, two PFA Footballer of the Year awards, four Golden Boots and the acknowledgement, even drawn from the massed ranks of envying rival supporters, that he is the best striker of his generation, perhaps the best English football has ever seen. But mere numbers would never have convinced him alone. It was, typically for a Frenchman, love. "A lot of stuff helped me to stay, like my family, my love of London, David Dein and Arsène Wenger. Also I couldn't let down the fans and my team. When I've seen how Fabregas has been playing in the past four or five months, as well as Eboué, Flamini and Abou Diaby, they are all young players who have raised their game. I'm more than proud of this team. You're talking about young players who can make a team like Barcelona look ordinary and it's very special to do that with 10 men. I said to the guys when I walked into the dressing room I wasn't even disappointed. We showed against the best team in Europe we can play good football.

"I told the boss it would be difficult to leave because of the passion. The stadiums are always full and the reception away is amazing. I watch Juve, Real Madrid and Barcelona on television and they are not always full. I enjoy playing at home or away in England and getting some stick. This is where I belong."

"This is where I belong," the words could have been spoken by Charlie George, Holloway-born, lifelong Arsenal supporter and superstar. Instead they

were being spoken by a Frenchman, born of Caribbean parents, who came to the Club via Italy and was spurning the Spanish to stay. Without irony, Henry called London "my home".

Wenger was at the vanguard of the delight. "I believe Thierry is the best-ever player in the Premiership. You can have opinions, but you must check the statistics. With great players, you check two things: one, they make their team; and two, the statistics will prove his worth. For him, it is not just about the goals – I rate the assists much more and that shows what a team player he is. "When I think about whether I'd prefer to win the European Cup or keep Henry, that was torture. My target at the start of the week was to win the Champions League and keep Henry. I managed only one, but it's the best one in terms of the future." The wider reactions were disparate. Arsenal followers sang in the streets. The rabidly Barcelonista newspaper Sport in Spain ran the headline: 'Henry, It's Your Loss'. More magnanimous was the response from the Barcelona president, Joan Laporta. "He is free to decide what he wants to do and his decision tells a lot about him as a person. He was excited about the idea of coming over here, but he feels that he owes something to the Arsenal fans. He could be an example to every player."

That would suit Henry. He once said: "I want people to say good things. Not just that I was a good footballer, but a good man, too."

**Sue Mott**

**11.**

# **Chapman's legacy**

The climate of professionalism, discipline and expectation that was created by the great Herbert Chapman is sustained as first George Allison and then Tom Whittaker drive Arsenal forward

# The secret of success

An unusual aspect of Arsenal's rise to eminence during the 20th century was that three of their so-called managers were in no sense football coaches. In the first half of the century, coaches in the true sense were few and far between. Predominantly, players were good or not so good, played spontaneously, combined instinctively, and a club's fortunes varied in direct relation to the form of the players, individually and collectively. Managers were mostly secretary-managers, with the emphasis on the first word, who had the overall responsibility of running the club under the direction – which could be greater or lesser – of the chairman and board of directors. At Highbury, George Allison, Tom Whittaker, and later Bertie Mee, were all in a sense secretary-managers, their influence on the field of play being essentially as man-managers. Players were bought on an estimation of what they might do, much more than what they might be instructed to do. In the case of Mee, an outstanding man-manager, he was able to enjoy a partnership with Don Howe, one of the first and most imaginative coaches in the English game in the second half of the last century. Allison and Whittaker lacked any such advantage, and, therefore, were much more vulnerable to the form of individuals or, say, the collective ageing of a squad.

Allison, converting a room during wartime at Highbury into a makeshift flat, managed a depleted playing squad, augmented by guest players until peacetime reassembly began in the 1946/1947 season. With the Club in debt following heavy expenditure on pre-war stadium development, this was a difficult time for a man more entrepreneur than technical coach. Arthur Milton, a youngster from Bristol signed that year prior to doing his National Service who subsequently became the last double international at football and cricket, has distant memories of the rotund, socially polished Allison "with his very posh broadcaster's accent. He was a very good man-manager, a bit aloof, and as a youngster I didn't see much of him. Tom [Whittaker], the physio, looked after the training, which was entirely physical. I started playing in the Eastern Counties League side, with George Male as the coach. Jack Crayston, who was second in charge behind Tom, took care of our digs, and wrote to our parents to reassure them. Arsenal



looked after you very well." Allison was more than content to leave playing affairs in Whittaker's hands. When asked on one occasion whether what Whittaker had said was true, he is alleged to have replied: "Of course it is. What did he say?"

What held Arsenal together as much as anything in the immediate post-war period was the aura created by Herbert Chapman and now fostered by Whittaker. Laurie Scott, the England full-back, related in David Lemmon's *Arsenal in the Blood*: "I'm certain there was nowhere better in discipline. It even trained you so that you were prepared when you met the King and Queen. You always had to be on your best behaviour, [so] you were able to move into any company."

Together with the aura, there continued the predominance of the long-ball game, based on fast, striking wingers. Whittaker, delegated by Allison to determine the style of play, relied on this established policy. While on the one hand he had revolutionised the dressing room and treatment room with his physiotherapy regime, training, as such, was largely left in the players' hands. Wilf Copping, unrestrained ogre at wing-half, recalled that Whittaker just sent them out to do their own running, saying: "I shall know on Saturday whether you have done enough or not."

Milton said: "Tom was not a great influence on the field, and I think the problem was he was not actually good at reading a player. He wanted people who could kick the length of the field." Milton believed that this overall lack of player judgment was partially responsible, in the long term, for Whittaker's early death, similar to Chapman's. "You had only to look at some of them [brought in by Whittaker when manager] to see they couldn't play. Players are the best judges of each other, you know what a bloke is like if you play with him," Milton said.

For Allison, it was a tough re-baptism. The only first-team survivors from the pre-war period were George Male and Bernard Joy in defence and Cliff Bastin in attack. Jack Crayston, Ted Drake and Alf Kirchen had been finished by injuries, and Walley Barnes was out of action for a while with a serious knee problem.

The writing was on the wall on the opening day of the 1946/1947 season, when Arsenal were overpowered by Wolverhampton Wanderers 6-1 at Molineux. It was going to need more than Allison's debonair interviews and the resolution of Whittaker, who had been awarded the MBE while serving as a squadron leader in the engineering branch of the RAF and who was responsible within the Air Ministry for secret work in connection with the D-Day landings. The Club's survival in the top flight would be dependent on the likes of Laurie Scott and Reg Lewis in attack, and in midfield on a mercurial Jimmy Logie, a

former bricklayer, a ball player almost in the class of Alex James, but a lightweight at only 5ft 5in. With several defeats in the first 10 games, it swiftly became evident that something drastic was required, never mind that 11 goals from Lewis partially disguised the inadequacies of a side obliged to play on their neighbour's ground at White Hart Lane because of bomb damage to Highbury. The personality and skill of a couple of foreigners – Albert Gudmundsson, from Iceland, and on the wing Dr Kevin O'Flanagan, an Irish international at both football and rugby – were insufficient decorations in a team lacking gravitas. However, a solution presented itself in November. Everton's Joe Mercer had become, inexplicably, available following a dispute with the manager. He had been an outstanding wing-half with England immediately pre-war, had formed an illustrious wartime half-back line with Cliff Britton and Stan Cullis, and over 14 years with Everton had given unbroken displays of fortitude and good humour. He did not need to move, as he ran a flourishing grocery business in Hoylake, yet though already 32, Mercer knew that he still had some good years left in him. Allison considered a transfer fee of £7,000 a bargain, never mind that Mercer carried a suspect left knee which limited his foraging into attack. Allison's answer to that, in one of his few tactical interventions, was to persuade Mercer to adopt a more deep-lying role to bolster the defence, and it was this that stabilised the team. It was the fashion at Highbury for the senior player in the team on any day to be captain, and when Male or Leslie Compton were absent, the job was now given to Mercer.

Within a fortnight of Mercer's debut, a 2-2 draw against Bolton Wanderers, the equally unlikely Ronnie Rooke had been enlisted in attack. Improbably, Rooke was already 35 and in relative decline with Fulham when Arsenal offered £1,000 plus two players. Rooke crossed London with his boots under his arm in a brown paper bag and, in an unimaginable transformation, proceeded to hit 21 goals in 24 matches. Such was the lift given to Arsenal by their two new players that Rooke was not even top scorer for the season, that honour belonging to Lewis, with 29 goals in 28 games, as the team soared up the table from the relegation zone to finish in 13th place. However, the responsibilities had become too much for Allison, by now 64, and at the end of the season he resigned. At the same time the door closed for Bastin, who had played only six times that season, his play diminished by an operation for deafness.

Another key figure in Arsenal's revival that season had been Logie. Of all of Arsenal's great players of the 20th century, there is probably more argument about the merits of the unassuming little Logie than any other. Some saw him as the reincarnation of Alex James, others a dribbler in midfield who held on to the ball for too long on heavy grounds on account of his lack of power for hitting the

longer pass with a heavy leather ball. In 1946/1947, he made 35 first-team appearances and scored eight goals, yet it was his relevance to the play of Rooke and Lewis that was the key to Arsenal's improvement. Milton, who would play with him in subsequent seasons, regarded Logie as "the best player I knew at Arsenal, he was never out of the game. He was the sort of player who made you play; if he was off-form or out of the side we were never as good." Bernard Joy, in his history of the Club, entitled *Forward Arsenal*, revealed a jaundiced view of Logie, but for thousands of Arsenal followers Logie was, with Mercer, the soul of the team. This was never more so than in the following season when, with his 39 appearances and eight goals, he was a focal point in winning the Championship.

In the close season, the squad was strengthened by two new signings, Archie Macaulay from Brentford, a tough argumentative Scotland wing-half, and Don Roper, a winger from Southampton whose grandfather had played for Chesterfield and father for Huddersfield Town and the Royal Marines. The 1947/1948 season had an uplifting start, with six consecutive victories, the first defeat not occurring until the 18th game, away to Derby on November 29. Suddenly Arsenal were back at the forefront of the game, Macaulay creating a formidable half-back line with Mercer and Leslie Compton. Ian McPherson, a war hero as an RAF pilot, earning the DFC and bar, converted to left-wing to accommodate Roper on the right and Rooke bludgeoned his way through the middle for 33 goals. George Swindin was ever-present in goal over 42 matches; next came Mercer, Macaulay and Roper on 40, Scott and Logie on 39. A telling moment came in the seventh match, a goalless draw away to Preston North End. Leslie Compton, returning to the team after completion of his cricket duties with Middlesex, was given the ball by Whittaker as captain. The altruistic Compton passed it to Mercer, observing that "you've done a good enough job so far". Over the next five seasons, Mercer would reveal himself as one of the most exemplary captains in the game's history.

Arsenal's appeal beyond Highbury was growing to huge, pre-war proportions. On November 1, 1947, there was an attendance of 67,277 at Stamford Bridge for the goalless draw with Chelsea, while on the same afternoon 27,000 watched the clubs' reserves match at Highbury. Yet not all was acclaim. A streak in October-December saw them score only nine goals in 10 games, three from penalties by Rooke, and the old charge of negative football began to re-emerge. The role of Mercer and Macaulay at wing-half was not to go roaring into attack, leaving the team vulnerable to counterattack, but to ensure that Arsenal enjoyed a preponderance of possession. The Christmas period saw Arsenal falter, with a draw away to Sunderland, defeat at home to Liverpool, and

then the ignominy of elimination from the FA Cup by Bradford Park Avenue from the Second Division – at Highbury, too. The only goal, by Billy Elliot, later to be transferred to Burnley, saw Arsenal fall to inferiors whose centre-half was one Ron Greenwood.

However, Arsenal were still leading the League, the 37-year-old Male having briefly returned into service for a New Year's Day victory at Bolton, and they now faced the challenge of matches against their nearest rivals, Manchester United, unbeaten in 13 matches, and Preston. Because of bomb damage at Old Trafford, United were still playing their home matches at Maine Road, and the visit of Arsenal, for a 1-1 draw, drew the all-time Football League record attendance of 83,260. An unwell Mercer played following penicillin injections only 48 hours before kick-off. Against Preston at home, Lewis struck two of his season's 14 goals in a 3-0 win and, although there was defeat in February away to Aston Villa, the march towards the title was impressive, including respective 5-2 and 7-0 home wins against Wolves and Middlesbrough. For an unhappy Robert Anderson, this was to be his only appearance in goal for Middlesbrough.

Arsenal were left needing a mere six points from nine matches to clinch the title. To give Whittaker his due, in his first season in full command, while he was dependent on sustained individual form, he had recaptured some of the élan of the Chapman era by re-instituting open, free-handed team talks in which self-criticism was rife. He had further developed a tactical awareness among the players by sending a scout to watch future opponents. The players might themselves determine the tactics, but Whittaker characteristically helped broaden their minds. Meanwhile, well aware of the ageing elements in this galloping team, he had signed Cliff Holton, a blustering amateur winger from Oxford City, Peter Goring from Cheltenham Town, and Alex Forbes from Sheffield United, another aggressive Scottish midfielder.

The climax of the season, with five matches remaining, was actually something of an anticlimax. A goal from Roper earned a draw away to Huddersfield Town. On the return train journey to London, Denis Compton, dashing down the platform at Doncaster, grabbed an evening paper that revealed defeats for Manchester United, Burnley and Derby. Arsenal were champions. Male had distinguished his last first-team appearance with another evergreen display.

They ripped eight goals past Grimsby Town in the concluding match, with four from Rooke that made him the League's leading scorer, at the age of 36, with a total of 33. To help ensure this feat – he needed two to overhaul Stan Mortensen of Blackpool – Alex Forbes had obliged on one, dribbling through a static defence, then placing his foot on the ball on the goalline, leaving Rooke to

tap it into the net. Whittaker thus marked his first season as manager by leading Arsenal to their sixth League title, by a seven-point winning margin, a record at the time shared with Aston Villa and Sunderland, though Arsenal's titles had all come after the First Division was raised to 22 clubs. They had now won the title using only 18 players, the same as West Bromwich in 1919/1920, although one further player, Lionel Smith, played in the last match against Grimsby. The 32 goals conceded, a new defensive record since the change in the offside law in 1925, seemed to confirm the accusation of negative football, yet this was more than contradicted by the 81 they scored, surpassed that season only by Wolves. Whittaker was duly presented by the players with a silver cigarette box, a token of their affection for his leadership.

Not that Whittaker was self-satisfied. This was the oldest side to win the title in modern football; Whittaker had already acknowledged the need to bring in new faces by buying Doug Lishman, a goalscorer with Walsall in the Third Division, during the summer. This move anticipated the retirement at the end of the season of the remarkable Rooke, who in 88 First Division games contributed 68 goals. Still game for the fray, he moved at 37 to become player-manager at Crystal Palace, where he continued for another two seasons. Though Arsenal enjoyed their moments in 1948/1949, it was a relatively humdrum season in which they would nonetheless finish a respectable fifth behind champions Portsmouth, while enjoying a three-goal FA Cup victory over Tottenham Hotspur before going out to Derby County in the next round. The season was marred by the death of chairman Sir Samuel Hill-Wood early in the new year. He had set a standard at Highbury of letting appointed professional administrators do the job of running the Club. His paternal attitude was regarded with affection by all. He was succeeded by Sir Bracewell Smith, a former Lord Mayor of London and a director of Wembley Stadium. In the spring, Sir Samuel's son Denis became a new member of the board, and in due course would succeed Sir Bracewell as chairman.

Rooke might have departed before the 1949/1950 season, but Mercer, now in his 36th year, was still there and was hungry for the trophy he had yet to win, the FA Cup. League performances were not markedly better than the previous season, with the team finishing sixth in the table as Portsmouth retained the title. In the Cup, though, it was another matter, as fortune smiled upon Arsenal by giving them four consecutive home ties against Sheffield Wednesday (1-0), Swansea Town (2-1), Burnley (2-0) and Leeds United (1-0). In the semi-final they were drawn against Chelsea, with the shortest possible journey, down the road to White Hart Lane. Chelsea led by two goals, both from the adroit Roy Bentley. Arsenal fought back, and shortly before half-time Freddie Cox, signed

from Spurs the previous September, reduced the lead direct from a corner kick, hitting an inswinger off the outside of his right foot which deceived Harry Medhurst in goal. Chelsea still led with 15 minutes remaining. As Denis Compton shaped for a corner kick, Mercer waved back brother Leslie as he advanced for a possible header, being anxious about a counter-attack from any clearance. Leslie ignored his captain, met his brother's kick head-on and Arsenal were level. In the replay, Arsenal were more in command, and again it was Cox who did the damage, though not until extra time and with his weaker left foot.

Thus Arsenal's journey to the final at Wembley was the longest they had to make in the competition. Their opponents were Liverpool, which created a slight embarrassment for Mercer, because Anfield was where he trained midweek. He was asked not to attend the ground during Liverpool's morning sessions. They were managed by George Kay, captain of West Ham United in the first Wembley final of 1923, and looked to possess the probable matchwinner in Scotland's winger Billy Liddell. Moreover, Liverpool had won both of that season's League meetings, and had been in the running to achieve the Double right up to the week before the final, when they lost 2-1 to Portsmouth. Would the stress mar their Wembley effort? Prior to the final, Mercer received the Footballer of the Year award voted for by the Football Writers' Association. Though Forbes had missed the replay against Chelsea, he was preferred to Macaulay for Wembley. A dispirited Macaulay opted to leave for Fulham during the summer. In attack, the strategic, experienced Lewis was preferred to Lishman, while Liverpool made the error of selecting an inexperienced Kevin Baron at inside-forward in preference to the veteran schemer Jack Balmer.

On an afternoon of persistent drizzle, Arsenal were dominant. Six of their team had played at Wembley before, and their long-passing game opened up Liverpool's ranks. Leslie Compton was masterful in the centre of defence, while his brother enjoyed perhaps his best-ever game. "Leslie was a gentle giant," reflects Arthur Milton. "So solid and two-footed. He could play the ball out to the wings with either foot, and was always in charge in the air. Denis was left-sided, though he batted right-handed. He was the kind of player who wanted the ball all the time – though by 1950 he was getting a bit past it – and he had this wonderful left foot and was a great crosser of the ball."

Arsenal's football on the day made Liverpool look mundane – Logie, Lewis and Goring were moving on a higher plateau. The first goal came after 17 minutes, a blueprint move. Goring pressurised Cyril Sidlow, Liverpool's goalkeeper, into a misdirected clearance. Leslie Compton headed the ball left to full-back Walley Barnes, who threaded it forward to Logie. His perfectly timed through-pass left Lewis with the simplest of tasks in shooting wide of an

advancing Sidlow. Liverpool's expectation was much reduced by the powerful and not always legal assault that Forbes, in support of right-back Laurie Scott, was inflicting upon Liddell. Early in the second half, Liverpool were unfortunate not to equalise when a cross from Liddell beat Swindin, only for the goalkeeper to save on the line as right-winger Jimmy Payne came in to meet the ball. With just under half-an-hour remaining, Freddie Cox made the opening for Lewis to double the lead, and though Liverpool made a late rally, the Cup was Arsenal's, and Mercer's.

The forward march of a successful club is uncompromising in the turnover of players, in the introduction of new blood. Or it should be, if success is to be continued. Arsenal might have won the Cup and previously the League in the space of three seasons, but in 1950/1951 there were a number of introductions to the first team, including Jack Kelsey, Ray Daniel, Cliff Holton, Dave Bowen and Arthur Milton – the last of a rare breed: a double football/cricket international. Daniel, whose brother Bobby was killed in action during the war, had been an amateur with Swansea City, and jumped to prominence when elevated by the Welsh selectors from Arsenal's reserves to play for Wales at centre-half against England, oddly, in preference to John Charles. Against an England attack of Finney (Preston North End), Mannion (Middlesbrough), Milburn (Newcastle United), Baily and Medley (both Spurs), Daniel gave a performance superior to his Club colleague Leslie Compton, never mind that England won 4-2. (Daniel would now be at Compton's elbow for the position at Highbury, and would take over as first choice in 1951/1952.) It had also been Leslie's first cap – Denis's football career was over, his attention confined to cricket and defeating Australia – and at 38 he was the oldest player to make his England debut. Compton won his only other cap a week later in a 2-2 draw against Yugoslavia. Though Compton was the stronger of the two in the air, Daniel proved more adept on the ground, though at times his skill led him into errors when safetyfirst should have been the priority.

Dave Bowen, signed from Northampton Town, as tenacious as Mercer, was a good understudy at wing-half, while Milton, a beautifully fluent player on the wing, lacked only a match-winning instinct. He had that appealing characteristic of playing the game for fun. All went well enough for Arsenal until Christmas-time, even if Peter Goring was unable to maintain the form which had forced him into the winning Cup side. Logie and former commando Lishman made good in the centre of attack, even if a variation on the wings between Cox, McPherson, Milton and Roper was under-achieving. But Lishman broke his leg against Stoke on Christmas Day, and thereafter the team scored only 22 goals and 13 points in the 17 matches before his return near the end of the season.

Arsenal finished an inconspicuous fifth, 13 points behind neighbours Tottenham Hotspur, only the second London side to take the title. The interwoven passing patterns of Spurs, under the direction of manager Arthur Rowe, had been the season's delight.

Milton, springing into prominence, was to help make the 1951/1952 season one to remember, even if for him it would end in frustration at being excluded from a Cup Final side. What it did bring, besides fond memories for Arsenal followers, was his single cap for England, in the home draw against Austria in November. "I'd only played 12 games in the First Division," he recalled. "Those were the days when the selectors strangely played ducks and drakes with Matthews and Finney on the wings, in and out. We were training at Highbury on a Friday morning when Jimmy [Logie] suddenly called out: 'Get your boots, you're wanted at Wembley.' Apparently Finney had been injured, and I guess I was the nearest player available for Wembley. I didn't have a great match; with Billy Wright, right-footed, behind me at wing-half, the ball went left all the time to Eddie Baily and Les Medley on the other flank. The chance was a bit early for me. We should have scored four or five in the first 20, but didn't get one, and after that we struggled a bit." Milton's self-effacement was characteristic. He does not say that two of those missed chances were by his insideforward partner Ivor Broadis from openings he had created. When told earlier in the season by Whittaker that he was thinking of introducing him away to Liverpool, Milton had replied that he thought some other up-and-coming youngster was worth a try. "I don't know what Tom would have thought of me after that," he admits, half a century later. His lack of conviction, together with that slightly irresponsible streak of dribbling at his full-back for the sheer pleasure of it, jeopardised a consistent place in the team.

Holton, at 22 a year younger than Milton, ran into impressive form from the opening match of the season, and by the middle of November had scored 14 goals. With his bustling stride and fearsome shot, he carried the air of a new Ted Drake, but by degrees opposing defenders learned to drop off and cover and take advantage of his relative lack of speed. Nevertheless, sustained form by the team had, by springtime, placed Arsenal within range of achieving the Double – the first time the Club had been in that position since 1932. That they failed in their bid was due to the old story of fixture congestion. There was a conflict of interest around the time of a replayed FA Cup semi-final against Chelsea in April, immediately after which they dropped three points in away games at Blackpool and Bolton Wanderers. The defeat at Bolton was the first since losing at Sunderland at the end of December. They held their place in the League race by winning the return against Blackpool on Easter Monday, but a run of injuries,



including to Compton, Smith, Cox and Logie, seriously jeopardised prospects in both trophies. With a place in the Cup Final secured, they needed to win all three remaining League matches to overhaul Manchester United. They beat Stoke City comfortably at home, 4-1. Willpower, however, was not enough, and they fell 3-1 at West Bromwich Albion and 6-1 at Manchester United to finish in third place.

In the FA Cup, the first three rounds had passed without incident, with a total of 12 goals scored without reply against Norwich City, Barnsley and Leyton Orient. In the sixth round, Luton Town took the lead at home, but with Cox and Roper switching wings for the second half, and Milton shining as deputy for the injured Logie at inside-forward, Arsenal went 3-1 ahead before Luton scored a second. The semi-final against Chelsea required, as two years before, two matches at White Hart Lane. Following a 1-1 draw in which Logie returned in place of Milton, Arsenal ran away with the replay. Cox, with two, and Lishman were the scorers. A snowstorm which caused the postponement of the first match for a week and the need for a replay meant that the League fixtures against Newcastle and West Bromwich had to be squeezed into the gap between the semi-final and final, to Arsenal's serious disadvantage.

Fate continued to haunt Arsenal all the way to the Cup Final against Newcastle, and into the match itself. Newcastle, without League aspirations, had eased off in the final weeks, and were untroubled by injuries. For Arsenal, the drubbing by Manchester United merely served to increase their anxieties. Milton, though the most good-natured of competitors, felt particularly sore at his exclusion from the lineup at Wembley. He had vied with Cox for the right-wing position all season, and had deputised for Logie effectively at inside-forward. Logie's injury in the three weeks prior to the final was an infection in the hair follicles from embrocation used in the massage of a thigh injury. He came out of hospital only three days before the final, and would play swathed in bandages. Cox kept his berth on the wing, no doubt on account of his three goals in the semi-final encounters with Chelsea. Daniel would be able to take his place at centre-half, Newcastle agreeing to him wearing a light plastic shield on his broken wrist. Holton got the nod over Goring and Lewis at centre-forward, while Lishman had recovered sufficiently to play as joint striker. It was a team, but hardly a unit.

Even the weather conspired against Arsenal, with light rain providing a wet surface which suited the pace of Bobby Mitchell on the wing and Newcastle's strikers Jackie Milburn and George Robledo. Milburn was always going to provide a nightmare experience for the experienced, but, by now, slowing Walley Barnes at right-back, playing his 58th game of the season. Yet in spite of

everything, Arsenal began confidently and early on Lishman was close to giving them the lead with a shot which beat Ronnie Simpson in goal but flew just wide. Shortly after this, there was another crucial setback. Barnes, attempting to halt the weaving Mitchell, twisted his knee on the turn and thereafter was a passenger on the right wing for a short while until he eventually had to leave the field for good. Arsenal faced the remaining 55 minutes with only 10 men.

In response to this daunting task, Joe Mercer produced one of the finest performances of his career, never mind his 38 years. Together with Daniel and Forbes, he relentlessly harried Newcastle's superior attack and even Don Roper, now playing as emergency full-back, managed to hold his own against the quicksilver Mitchell. So effective was Arsenal's defence that Swindin, in goal, remained relatively untested, though once Smith had to clear off the line from Milburn. Far from yielding, Arsenal even occasionally carried the ball to the other end and there were only 11 minutes left when Lishman, climbing to meet a corner from Cox, headed powerfully, only to see the ball agonisingly clip the top of the crossbar. Though it was anything but a brilliant match, the heroics on the part of Arsenal, led by Mercer, warmed the heart of any neutral. Newcastle had their chances besides the clearance by Smith. Two more headers by Mitchell were kept out by Swindin. Logic, however, suggested Newcastle must surely score against depleted opposition.

And fortune remained merciless. With five minutes remaining, with Daniel nursing his injured arm, further pained by another blow, Logie limping on his damaged thigh, and Holton and Roper both on the ground needing the trainer's attention, the ball sped once more to Mitchell on the wing. Mercer was pleading with referee Arthur Ellis to halt the game to allow treatment for Holton and Roper, but Ellis let play continue. Mitchell placed his centre accurately, and Robledo's downward header grazed in off the foot of a post. In a futile gesture, Roper was then allowed treatment.

Still Arsenal were not done. A free kick from Forbes was met by a scuffle of players, the ball skimming just wide. Arsenal remained full of heart, but soon the game was over. First to the Arsenal dressing room was Stan Seymour, Newcastle's former player and now chairman. "We won the Cup, but you've won the honours," he said. Speaking at the Club's banquet that evening, a gallant Mercer stated: "I'd always thought that football's greatest honour was to captain England. I was wrong. It was to captain Arsenal today." The forlorn look on the Arsenal players' faces at the end after they'd given so much remains a vivid picture.

In an unavailing bid for the Double, Cliff Holton had scored 17 times in his 28 matches – short of leading scorer Lishman's 23 in 38 - but a significant total

for an aspiring centre-forward. He and Lishman would continue this partnership in the 1952/1953 season, with Holton scoring 19 goals in 21 games and Lishman 22 in 39. They were a duo who would lie at the heart of Arsenal recapturing the League title. Equally significant was the continuation of that gnarled old oak, Mercer, whose retirement had been predicted for the past two or three years, but who decided yet again, to no surprise from his supportive wife Norah, that those bowed legs could carry him through just one more campaign. By contrast, the unfortunate Barnes was missing for the entire season, but the deputies Joe Wade and John Chenhall did well in his absence. Although Swindin opened the season in goal, he gave way from September to April to the resolute and improving Kelsey.

A highlight of the season, not inappropriately, came on Christmas Day, when Arsenal were away to Bolton. The home side led through their captain Willie Moir, but Arsenal went ahead before half-time through Milton and Holton, and extended their advantage to 4-1 in the first five minutes of the second half through Logie and Roper. Moir scored again for Bolton, to reduce the deficit to 4-2, only for Daniel to restore Arsenal's three-goal advantage. In a frantic ending to the game, Holton took Arsenal's tally to six, before two goals by Nat Lofthouse cut the lead to 6-4. At the last, Bolton were awarded a penalty, but Kelsey, facing a spot-kick for the first time in Division One, saved the shot from Bobby Langton. This was exceptional entertainment, in a season when Arsenal, although they were to be the eventual champions, were not always convincing. Their total of 54 points, with a goal tally of 97 for and 64 against, was the lowest ever, and they were taken all the way to the finish by Preston North End.

In the penultimate match, away to Preston, they went down 2-0 to goals by the renowned Tom Finney and Charlie Wayman. Each club had one match remaining. Preston played first on the Wednesday prior to the Cup Final and defeated Derby 1-0, before departing on a close-season tour while still awaiting news of their fate. Arsenal needed to win at home to Burnley on the day before the Cup Final to snatch the title. In the worst imaginable start at Highbury, Mercer put the ball into his own net within moments of the kick-off. The response was convincing: Forbes, Lishman and Logie put Arsenal 3-1 in front before Burnley could score again. The outcome was that Arsenal had taken the title on goal average by a mere fraction of a goal. Mercer, Logie and Roper were champions again, five years after their 1947/1948 triumph. Swindin, though now second-string to Kelsey, had also made enough appearances, 14, to qualify for a medal, 15 years after his first. Roper admitted: "The defensive side of our game was probably better in 1948. We went out then for every match not expecting to concede a goal."

A third Championship title, including that with Everton in 1939, did seem the ideal moment for Joe Mercer to retire, yet dressing room encouragement, including that of Whittaker, persuaded him to continue once again for the 1953/1954 campaign. The close season had seen the death, at the age of 51, of Alex James from cancer, and this sad news presaged a miserable start to the campaign, with six defeats and two draws in the opening eight matches. In the last of these, a resounding 7-1 loss against Sunderland at Roker Park, Swindin was injured in a collision with Trevor Ford when Sunderland were leading 2-1. It proved to be his last match.

In a bid to halt the slide, Whittaker gambled on the purchase of Tommy Lawton, the formerly flawless centre-forward for Everton and Chelsea. A member of the legendary immediate post-war England forward line with Matthews, Raich Carter, Wilf Mannion and Finney, Lawton was now ekeing out an ailing career as player-manager of Brentford at the age of 34. Could Lawton emulate Ronnie Rooke? He first appeared against Manchester City in a 2-2 draw in mid- September, but Whittaker's optimism proved ill-founded. Lawton gained selection only nine times that season, and his first goal did not arrive until a 1-1 draw with Aston Villa in April. He would admit that his error had been in not signing for George Allison when Burnley were approached for him in 1936.

Slowly Arsenal's halo was dissolving. It was sadly symptomatic when, playing at home to Liverpool in April, 1954, Mercer broke his leg in an innocent collision with full-back Joe Wade. As he departed the stage on a stretcher, his final wave to the crowd brought tears to the eyes of many people, conscious that this was the closing moment of an exceptional career.

The final League position of 12th heralded impending years of decline for the Club that had become arguably the most widely known in the world. They would win nothing again until the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1970, and between 1954 and 1969 they would only once finish above fifth, in contrast to the period between 1930 and 1953, when they had finished lower than fifth on only three occasions. The FA Cup was to hold even less distinction, with defeats by the humble such as Northampton Town, 3-1 in 1958; Rotherham United, 2-0 in the second replay in 1960; Peterborough United, 2-1 in 1965.

A particular sadness in the season 1954/1955 was the final appearances of both Milton and Logie. "I gave up because I could see we weren't going anywhere," Milton reflected, "so I decided to concentrate on cricket. I went for a chat with Tom [Whittaker] and he understood. Bristol City were trying to win the Third Division South and approached me, so I played for them for half a season in 1955/1956. I think the decline at Highbury was partially down to Tom. Marvellous organiser that he was, I think he lacked foresight regarding players;

there was no coaching the way there was when first Ron Greenwood and then Don Howe arrived.

"The end for Jimmy [Logie] was especially unfortunate. Arsenal prided themselves on their behaviour, they didn't stand any nonsense on the field, and that's what happened to Jimmy. The trouble was that he was the mainstay of the side, and I don't think they realised what they were losing. It happened when we played Moscow Spartak in a friendly at Christmas-time, with a Russian referee. Jimmy was captain and we were losing 2-1 with five minutes to go when I was fouled by their centre-half. Unbelievably, the referee gave an indirect free-kick inside the penalty area. When the final whistle went a few minutes later, the referee moved towards Jimmy to shake hands, and Jimmy just turned away from him. He never played for the Club again."

Although the 1955/1956 season began with a hat-trick by Lawton in the second match, a 3-1 home win over Cardiff, this was a false dawn. Lawton had moved on by the end of the year, and there were constant changes, especially in attack. By mid-October, after only 13 matches, seven different players had appeared on the left-wing alone. Barnes asked for his contract to be cancelled so that he might take up an appointment with the BBC, his knee no longer operable, and Roper took over the captaincy. Lishman's eight-year spell, with 125 goals in 226 matches, ended with his transfer to Nottingham Forest. New signings were full-back Stan Charlton and utility forward Vic Groves from Leyton Orient. Erratic selection brought erratic results, not least in the opening round of the FA Cup when tiny Bedford Town of the Southern League held Arsenal to a 2-2 draw at Highbury. In the replay, only a headed goal by Derek Tapscott in extra time rescued Arsenal from humiliation in the first game ever screened by ITV.

In February 1956, the club attempted to aid Whittaker by appointing Alec Stock, manager at Leyton Orient, as his assistant. The amiable Stock, finding his situation uncongenial, and being under pressure from Orient to return, departed after only two months. Though a run of six victories in March/April helped achieve a respectable final position of fifth, Arsenal were metaphorically, as Milton had suggested, on the skids. The one true international-class player remaining on the books was Kelsey in goal, a situation undisguised even by the team managing to reach the sixth round of the FA Cup where they lost 3-1 at home to Birmingham City.

The sad aftermath of this slightly depressing season came with Whittaker's death in October 1956, at University College Hospital in London, where he had undergone an operation the previous Easter. He himself had once admitted: "Someone has to drive himself too hard for Arsenal. Herbert Chapman worked himself to death for the Club and, if it is to be my fate, I am happy to accept it."

The tributes poured in. Joe Mercer, now manager of Sheffield United, after coaching Amateur Cup winners Pegasus during a year's convalescence, was unrestrained in his eulogy published in the *Daily Express*: "Meeting Tom Whittaker was the best thing that ever happened to me. He was the greatest man I ever met ... Arsenal was his kingdom, but in every soccer-playing country in the world he was acknowledged as a prince of the game ... he never shirked making a hard decision, like sacking or dropping a player, or any of the other things that can hurt deeply. But not the way Tom did it. All problems only had one solution – the one done with kindness ... Tom Whittaker never thought of the chairman, or of a player or of any one individual when he made a decision. If it was good for the Club, then it was right."

Denis Compton recalled that he had never seen Whittaker lose his temper. "He took infinite trouble with everyone whom he considered to be his responsibility. In my early days at Highbury, I often saw him there till eight, nine, ten o'clock at night, working to get players fit for the following Saturday. He'd do the work himself and wouldn't delegate it. He had a kind of genius for it ..."

In an attempt to reduce the stress of the dual role of secretary-manager, the Arsenal board split the job; Bob Wall was promoted to secretary, Jack Crayston, a playing member of teams who won two Championships and the 1936 FA Cup, became manager, having been Whittaker's assistant. Wall remembered, in tribute to Whittaker's geniality and his huge physical strength, an occasion when he had lifted the Compton brothers, one under each arm, and dropped them into the team bath. It was the passing of a notable figure, who over 30 years had contributed almost every waking moment of his life to helping Arsenal become one of the world's greatest clubs.

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **Mercer the magnificent**



**Joe Mercer's falling out with the management at Everton led to Arsenal signing a player whose indomitable spirit inspired not only the dressing room but the whole Club**

In the good old, bad old days of the maximum wage, prior to the freedom of payments negotiated by Jimmy Hill when chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association in 1960/1961, it was not uncommon for even the most outstanding players to be one-club men. Notable examples post-World War II were Jimmy Dickinson of Portsmouth and Billy Wright of Wolverhampton Wanderers, partners in a celebrated England half-back line. Joe Mercer, his career interrupted by the war and his England captaincy halted by injury, would have been another. It was Arsenal's good fortune that Mercer fell out with the manager at Everton, the club he had adored since boyhood and from whom he had no wish to part company. It happened partially on account of damaging his knee in one of the last of the wartime internationals, playing against Scotland in April 1946, when Willie Waddell, the robust Glasgow Rangers winger, inadvertently fell heavily on Mercer's leg. Mercer lasted the game, though severely restricted. Some observers, unaware of the extent of the injury, thought he was not trying, among them Theo Kelly, the Everton manager. Joe related: "I was staggered to learn that anyone could think my poor performance was because I wasn't trying. I never played a friendly game of football in my life, not even in the streets as a boy. For me, football is about 100 per cent effort. There was no way in which I wasn't going to give 110 per cent as captain of England. I had a bad game but I was injured."

The illusion about Mercer's commitment strangely continued back in Liverpool at the start of a new season, provocatively including Kelly, whose relationship with Mercer became openly antagonistic. Mercer would admit that perhaps he was not too accommodating, having been an RSMI (Regimental Sergeant Major Instructor) determining his own programme in wartime. Following a meeting with Cecil Baxter, the Everton chairman, in an attempt to defuse the situation, Mercer had told him that if the club would not transfer him, then he would retire from the game. By now he had no need of football financially, on account of a flourishing family grocery business in Hoylake. It so happened, however, that Mercer had had brief contact with Tom Whittaker, the Arsenal manager, at a match between the clubs at Goodison Park in September 1946. Mercer had made a friendly visit afterwards to the Arsenal dressing room, and Whittaker had been shocked to see the wasted condition of Mercer's leg,

since he had continued to play after incurring the injury in April. "Look at this, lads, you've been playing against 10 men," Whittaker said to his players. He was surprised that Mercer had been able to play for 90 minutes. Mercer's lack of fitness, in conjunction with his dispute, led to him being dropped by Everton, and when Whittaker heard that Mercer could be available, he wasted no time in making a bid.

There was little difficulty in persuading Everton to accept a fee of £7,000 in November that year. With hindsight, it is likely that Kelly was envious not only of Mercer's eminence as a player, but of his financial independence. It has always been a characteristic of the psychology of managers and coaches that they should be able to exert power over their players. This was something clearly beyond Kelly in this instance.

Mercer's transfer was to be as significant an event in Arsenal's history, it could be said, as the arrival of Chapman 21 years earlier, or of Alex James in 1929. What Mercer was to give to the Club, never mind that he was already 32, was not only an element of exceptional leadership and authority on the field, but a never-say-die spirit that is the gift of few players. He would exhibit this again and again over the next eight seasons. At the conclusion of almost every one of those, there would be speculation about his possible retirement, and every time it would be deflected, because in his indomitable mind he could never accept that he had come to the end of the road. His willpower infected the whole of the dressing room, the whole of the Club.

It was no surprise when, immediately prior to the FA Cup Final of 1950 against Liverpool, he was voted Footballer of the Year by the Football Writers' Association. He may have been a man of intensity on the pitch yet had the proverbial heart of gold, always conscious of the emotions of others. The morning after Liverpool had been defeated, he went to console his opponent Albert Stubbins, conscious of the depression experienced by any losing finalists, and spent time playing with Stubbins's four year-old son. To Mercer, age meant nothing. His wife Norah, six years younger, used to say: "If you go on being 31 any longer, I'll have caught you up and passed you." Of his performance in that final against Liverpool, Don Davies of the Manchester Guardian, wrote: "Arsenal won by superior strategy. They took note of Mercer's ripening years and fading stamina and turned these into advantages. He stationed himself well down the field, only slightly in front of Walley Barnes [at full-back] and in close touch with Les Compton [at centre-half]. This meant that Mercer could move quickly to Compton's aid if danger threatened down the centre, or to help Barnes if Jimmy Payne [Liverpool's right-winger] showed signs of becoming troublesome."

Never was Mercer's character, his durability and determination, more evident than in the losing FA Cup Final against Newcastle United two years later. Henry Rose reported in the Daily Express: "This Wembley will be memorable for the fiery, unyielding rearguard action fought by a thin, crippled red line. The game will live because of Mercer the magnificent. At 37, Joe has reached an age when nature should dictate economy of movement and action. But Joe was ever in the thick of the tense fight, rallying his depleted forces ... never has he risen to such heights. Is there such a killer of the ball in soccer, such a pure textbook opponent?"

With right-back Barnes off the field injured for the last 55 minutes, Mercer had played with an inspiration that infected his nine colleagues. In the era prior to substitutes, no team thus restricted has played with such conviction, led by the spirit of a captain for whom defeat never existed till the final whistle had gone.

Humour never deserted Mercer. Not least, he could never resist making fun of himself. He once said: "I started to think about retiring when I sprinted flat-out for the ball down the touchline, and the linesman went flying past me."

Arsenal regained the League title in 1952/1953. In the decisive final match at home to Burnley, a 51,586 crowd had ignored driving rain and cold wind to see Arsenal win 3-2. Despite giving Burnley the advantage of an early, rare own goal, Mercer played like a man possessed to help them reverse the setback and lead 3-1 within half-an-hour. His energy and emotions were seemingly inexhaustible. At 39, Mercer must surely now retire, but no. Persuaded by Whittaker and by the rest of the dressing room, he decided once more to continue. It proved to be a decision of questionable wisdom.

By Christmas, Arsenal had won only nine of 24 games, Mercer playing in only 13 of these. The team was at its lowest ebb for 26 years and Arsenal pottered through one of their worst-ever seasons. Prior to a home match with Liverpool, in April 1954, speculation again mounted about Mercer's retirement. The matter would be taken out of his hands with a broken leg. Beneath a picture of him being carried from the field on a stretcher, the *Sunday Graphic* reported: "That grand trouper, 39-year-old Joe Mercer of spindly legs and bounding energy, has gone from the soccer stage he graced for so long."

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **A Boy's Own fantasy**

The story of the Compton brothers, Denis and Leslie, is one that couldn't be made up. Both played football for Arsenal and England, and the pair were pretty useful at cricket too

A little boy, dark-haired and impish, is thrashing a tennis ball into a neighbour's front garden. A game of street cricket is in progress. His elder brother is keeping wicket and sundry like-minded little scamps are pretending to be WG Grace. But not this one. His shots are all cut from his own ingenuity. During pauses in play, he dribbles the ball round his team-mates with an astonishingly proficient left foot. The action is ceaseless. It lasts all day with a break for jam sandwiches at lunchtime. Just occasionally there is a pause in the boisterous endeavour.

"Les!" calls our young hero to his brother. "Just imagine if one day you and me go all the way. Imagine playing for Arsenal and England at football and Middlesex and England at cricket. What about that?"

His brother looks at the dreaming, wide-eyed boy and cuffs him affectionately round the ears. "Don't be daft, Denis," he says.

But Denis Compton wasn't daft. His sporting life was fantasy come true. It is staggering from the vantage point of the 21st century to imagine a sportsman so talented, so versatile, so resourceful that he should be able to play top-class football and first-class cricket simultaneously. That he should play for his country in both codes becomes even more incredible. That his brother should nearly emulate the extraordinary feat (he kept wicket for Middlesex but not his country) is mind-bending. And that he should be not just any jobbing batsman, but the greatest English entertainer ever to set foot on the hallowed turf of Lord's, hailed throughout his lifetime as a genius ... well you can only conclude that the Lord was astoundingly liberal with his gifts when Denis Compton was born to Harry and Jessie on May 23, 1918.

The Compton brothers comprise one of Arsenal's greatest pairings. Not an on-pitch double-act like Radford and Kennedy, or Henry and Bergkamp, or McLintock and Simpson. But, simply, as a *Boy's Own* storyline come true. Take the 1950 FA Cup Final, Denis Compton's swansong on the football field. He was 32. He knew his double life was over. His right knee, originally injured in a collision with Charlton defender Sid Hobbins in 1938, was a painful curse and testimony to the physical strains of his sporting life, not to mention social life. He had played 53 games for Arsenal, almost all on the left wing, scored 15 goals, but his body was telling him it was well nigh time to concentrate solely on cricket, his first and abiding love.

The first half at Wembley against Liverpool was far from his best. It might even have been his worst, hampered as he was by his recalcitrant knee. "I badly wanted to go out a winner, but the way I played in the first-half against Liverpool, I think I would have been pulled off if substitutes had been allowed." Instead, he returned to the dressing room at half-time where the manager, Tom Whittaker, administered a reviving pep talk. But sometimes mere words are not enough. It just so happened that Alex James, the former Arsenal great and idol to Compton, was helping out in the dressing room. He decided to administer something a little stronger. "Get this down you," he whispered, ushering Compton into the bath area and providing a hefty swig of brandy. Compton, rarely shy in the matter of imbibing alcohol, took it down in one gulp and played the second half with a great deal more exuberance and gusto. It was a fitting farewell.

For those who have only glimpsed his talents from sepia prints and hand-me-down stories, it is difficult to conjure the character of the man. Today we call it charisma. Adored by women, worshipped by men, sponsored by Brylcreem and unpunctual to a fault. He was always late, but utterly charming. Hopelessly disorganised but a virtuoso with the bat (anybody's bat that happened to be propped up by the dressing room door at Lord's.) The provision of kit was a matter of supreme disinterest to him. He would arrive for a football match without boots, or without any suitable apparel at all. There are many lovingly told tales of him arriving for cricket matches, important first-class matches, with not a minute to spare and in his dinner suit from the night before, praying that Middlesex were batting first so he could enjoy a sleep in an armchair before going out.

It was a joyous age of sport that allowed its supreme hero to be as cavalier and dashing in his civilian capacity as he was as a sporting professional. No undercover reporters from tabloid newspapers, no forensic press coverage, no wall-to-wall television cameras spoiled the freedom of his existence. He was a liberated man and played (and partied) like it. Brother Leslie was a different character. More robust and more prosaic, a wicketkeeper and a versatile centre-half who could play every other position on the field (including goalkeeper) and who made his debut for the England football team at the age of 38 – still, not surprisingly, a record.

The household that acted as the well-spring for this double act was not outwardly remarkable: 20, Alexander Road, Hendon, had many virtues but the main one was the tarmac street in front of it. Here young 'Compo' and his brother played endless street games, while their middle sister Hilda honed her skills as a schoolgirl 100-yard sprinter. Their father, Harry, ran a painting and

decorating business. Perhaps more significantly, he was an enthusiastic football player and cricketer, turning out on a regular basis for the Bell's Lane School Old Boys' cricket team. From a young age, Denis was allowed to accompany his dad to matches. He was given duties as a scorer, a huge privilege, and he was even sometimes allowed to play as a substitute when one of the Old Boys was encumbered with illness or a shopping trip with the wife. Opponents would eye this little lad of 12 and protest that he was too small to play. "Bowl as fast as you like," Harry would advise them. Upon following this tip, Denis, to the astonishment and perhaps annoyance of the adult strike force, would invariably whack them for a half-century.

Orthodoxy was unknown to him. He played with a freedom and fluency that suggested exhibitionism. But there was no arrogance in his manner. He was simply a boy having a wonderful time with a unique set of sporting gifts. The MCC offered him a position on the ground staff at Lord's a few weeks short of his 15th birthday. His mother was sure he should do no such thing. Perhaps a nice job at Hendon Town Hall would suffice. But Compton was the last man on earth to push paper clips. His brother was already on Arsenal's books as a promising young player. Denis joined him, identified by Herbert Chapman as a left-sided attacker. At least now he would be paid all year round. Football in the winter, cricket in the summer. His mother rested her objections. He earned 25 shillings a week at Lord's, for which he was obliged to roll the square and brush the bird droppings off the seats, among other glamorous tasks. But he did not remain among the domestic ranks for long. In 1936, he made his first-class debut for Middlesex and the following year he became the youngest player, at 19 years and 34 days, to play his first game for the England Test team. Typically sensational, he scored 65 against New Zealand. At the end of that remarkable season, he reported to Highbury immediately to resume his duties as a footballer.

It seems incredible. Imagine Thierry Henry turning out for the French cricket team, if they had such a thing. Or Harry Kewell, of Liverpool FC, turning up as batsman in the next Ashes series. Modern sport does not admit this swing-door approach to differing sports. Rigour and ruthless professionalism have resulted in specialisation. True, Ian Botham played both. But his football was plied at Scunthorpe United, an outpost, not Highbury, the home of the five-times Champions in the 1930s. As a footballer he made less impact on the sporting world than he did playing the musketeer with his cricket bat. But that did not make him a poor player. He made his first-team debut for Arsenal, having signed as a professional on his 17th birthday, against Glasgow Rangers in a friendly in 1936. This was no mean achievement. The favoured forward line at the time read like a who's who of attacking prowess: Bastin, James, Lambert, Jack and



Hulme (who, incidentally, played cricket for Middlesex). The insertion of one teenage D Compton was a compliment to his tricky, effervescent wing play. Certainly Rangers were impressed enough to seek his services with an offer of £2,000. George Allison, the Arsenal manager, put it to the young player, who declined. His first League appearance followed swiftly, before 65,000 at Highbury against Derby County. He scored Arsenal's first goal and held his place until Boxing Day. Meanwhile, Brother Leslie was fighting it out with Herbie Roberts for a place at centre-half. Neither brother was guaranteed a place in the great Arsenal side of that era.

Perhaps inhabiting such a world had repercussions for their cricket. In 1938, the Australians arrived for The Ashes series. DCS Compton promptly made 76 as his opening gambit against them. He was 20. Don Bradman, arguably the greatest batsman of all time, took pleasure in shaking him by the hand and complimenting him on his masterly innings. This would have pleased the younger man; eight years earlier he had spent the night outside Lord's on a camp bed before watching the great Bradman score 254 against England. Before reporting to Highbury again that autumn, Compton had to explain to Hendon Magistrates Court why he had been caught speeding in his car. Shades of the late 20th century when barely a week went by without Premiership footballers being caught by speed cameras in their overpowered, luxury sports cars. Compton's car was not over-powered, he was just late. He explained he had been on his way to play in the Second Test at Lord's and, as usual, was phenomenally behind the appointed hour. The presiding chairman was torn. Disgraceful ill-discipline on one hand, fabulous innings on the other. He congratulated Compton on his performances against the Aussies and then fined him heavily.

Just when life was bowling along in a highly agreeable fashion for the young Comptons, Hitler's egomania burst its banks. England declared war on Germany in September 1939, and Britain faced a challenge far exceeding the bounds of sport. The football season was suspended, the blackout curtains raised and the men of the country volunteered for battle. Denis joined the 90th AA Field Regiment Royal Artillery at East Grinstead, Sussex, but the Army decided in its wisdom he would be better employed teaching health and fitness to recruits. This was only partly true. "My job was to get British soldiers fit for the Burma campaign. Among the lads passing through were commandos on their way to top-secret missions against the Japanese. These guys were tough enough to break me in two. I used to tell them: 'Look chaps, we've got to make it seem as if I'm giving you a hard time. I'm going to take you on a run and when you get back I want you to let the officers know what a bastard I've been.' We would then run for a mile or so to a place where I had laid on some beer for the lads. Then we

would run back looking exhausted."

The Army concluded he was not quite the type to enjoy the rigours of soldierly discipline. They had another idea, he would play sport as a morale booster to the nation. This he certainly did. In March 1940, just in advance of the Nazis, he played football for the Army against their French counterparts. He subsequently played a cricket match at Lord's which was interrupted – but not abandoned – by the Battle of Britain raging overhead. Leslie watched. "It was difficult to give full concentration to the cricket matches because they were often as not mad-dash one-day games between bombing raids. Denis was playing for the Army against the RAF in 1940 when the sirens wailed to signal the first German aerial raid on London. They played on, not realising how serious it was until the sky became black with German bombers."

Hitler may have inconvenienced sport but on this British isle, its bulldog spirit to the fore, there was no possible way the German dictator could stop sport in its tracks altogether. Arsenal resumed activity, not at Highbury which was converted into an ARP station, but at the home of arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur, White Hart Lane. "It was really strange, playing at Spurs, the club that had traditionally been looked on by Arsenal supporters as the 'enemy'," Denis said.

Denis played 126 matches for Arsenal during the war, scoring 74 goals. He was in his footballing prime, his knee injury had yet to trouble him and so magnificent was his form that he received his call-up to the England football team to play Wales at Wembley in 1940. He played 11 wartime internationals in all, joining some of the finest players of the age, including Stanley Matthews and Tommy Lawton. He was, even in this company, by no means over-awed. Lawton used to joke that he crossed 'leg-breaks' because he imparted so much swerve to the ball with his left foot. This was just as well. His right was non-existent. That particular leg, and foot, were merely physical devices that served to stop him falling over. This was his football heyday. In April 1943, he scored his first England goal as the team beat Scotland in front of 105,000 spectators at Hampden Park. Even that massive crowd was surpassed in the Victory International at the end of the war when 139,468 fans squeezed themselves into the home of Scottish football for the match with the Auld Enemy, perhaps not entirely appropriate as a celebration of peace.

Bernard Joy, the former Arsenal centrehalf who went on to become one of the most distinguished football writers of his era, recalled the war-time 'Compo'. "My memories of Denis are of a winger playing incredible football that was at one and the same time exhilarating and frustrating. Denis played his football like he played his cricket, with invention that could not be found in any coaching manual. He was absolutely brilliant in taking on and beating defenders, but it

could be frustrating for his colleagues waiting for a pass that often came much too late. Our trainer, Billy Milne, used to lose sleep over the lovable rascal, who had a habit of turning up for a game at the very last minute without boots or any sort of kit whatsoever. I have known him go out on to the pitch in boots he had never seen before and win the match with blinding skill."

These exploits were curtailed in January, 1944, when Company Sergeant Major Compton caught the night train to Liverpool and from there set sail to India. He was to remain in the East until after the Japanese surrender in 1945. He travelled all over Burma in his sporting capacity to raise the morale of the troops. In India, he played 17 first-class cricket innings, finishing with an average of 90. He also remained, so it was said, unbeaten in 50 football matches. His war had been full of incident but also the undeniable pleasure of sport. Leslie was less fortunate – his platoon in the Middlesex Regiment had been the first to enter Belsen.

A generation of men grow misty-eyed when they contemplate the glorious golden summers of Compton in full flow. He was the perfect antidote to post-war austerity, a sportsman who instinctively, generously, unstintingly gave entertainment to the masses who followed him. His face stared down from countless billboards in his role as the 'Brylcreem Boy'. In 1941 he had married a beautiful dancer called Doris, but such was his fame and pulling-power the union was swiftly dissolved. He was obviously a spontaneous man and certainly he is credited with the spontaneous creation of that blessingcum- curse that later became known as 'the sporting agent'. Basically he was drowning in fan mail. He needed help. His help became a full-time and lucrative business.

The other cricketers at Middlesex admitted a certain envy at the size and quality of his mail. Regularly, the missives from his female admirers came adorned in perfume and containing locks of hair. The most obvious comparison today is with David Beckham, who has agents to manage his agents. Compton just had himself. He took to filing the surfeit of letters in the back of his car, chaotically stacked and permanently falling out of the vehicle every time he opened the door. Sometimes he just shoved them in suitcases. One story goes that this mountain of mail came to the attention of his friend and journalist, Reg Hayter. He must have been a good friend as he volunteered to sift through the missive mountain and discovered that, in addition to the marriage proposals, Compton was in receipt of many money-spinning offers to open fetes, give speeches and generally convert his fame into gold. Hayter recruited the businessman Bagenal Harvey to the cause.

The other story is that Bagenal discovered this stockpile of letters more immediately, by trying to climb into Compton's car one day outside Lord's. He

opened the door and an avalanche of letters tumbled on to his shoes. "God, your manager must have a tough time with this lot," he said. "I haven't got a manager," Compton replied. "You have now," said Harvey, who became (whichever story you believe) a pioneering sports agent and brokered the £9,000, nine-year deal with Brylcreem. Every Briton of a certain age will remember the posters. An impossibly handsome man, every hair groomed and gleaming, standing at the crease as though ready for the bowler's first ball. "Perfectly Set For The Day," ran the headline.

If only they had known about the entirely frenetic, haphazard, disorganised way Compton conducted his affairs, the script writers would hardly have been able to keep a straight face. But the randomness of his existence had its certain sweet advantages. Hayter, who bore a strong resemblance to the hero, recalled a story of mistaken identity which sheds light on 'Compo's' endearing attractions.

It was late one night during a Test at Old Trafford. Hayter had already been mistaken once for the great Denis by a man proffering a congratulatory glass of whisky. He played along, enjoying the ride and eventually slipping away to his own room. Upon opening the door, he discovered inside a charming and stark naked lady about to climb into his bed.

"What's going on?" Hayter demanded in surprise.

"Hallo, Denis darling," his companion said. "I have just come to give you a goodnight kiss."

At this point, her irate husband arrived and removed her from the premises. It is a fine and probably true story that entirely conveys the general esteem in which Compton was held.

His amiability and generosity gathered innumerable friends. He smoked, he drank, he gambled, he was impossibly susceptible to female company and, as such, his team-mates loved him. Football was becoming less and less important in his life as his cricketing prowess gathered force. Nevertheless, during Arsenal's FA Cup run in 1950, they faced Burnley in the fifth round and Joe Mercer, the Club captain, received a phone call from the manager Tom Whittaker.

"I'm thinking of picking Denis on the left wing," he said. "What do you think?" "Well," began Mercer, "he's at least a stone overweight and his bellows are out of condition. He's got a dodgy knee. He's hardly played all season and he's rusty. I shouldn't think he's good for more than 60 minutes. But I'd pick him."

The result: Arsenal won. Compton made the first goal and scored the second with a ferocious left-footed cross shot. He was the archetypal big-game hunter. When the stakes were at their highest, he summoned ever-greater reserves of

brilliance. Later in the dressing room, he sat with a comforting cigarette and told Mercer: "If I was a race horse, I think you'd have to shoot me."

There he might have had the assistance of a number of exasperated girlfriends. He married three times, the last and surviving time to Christine, PA to Bagenal Harvey. They were together 21 years. "He was hopelessly disorganised and utterly undomesticated throughout his life," Christine remembered. "He didn't even know how to put a plug on. I know that because we had a fridge as a wedding present and he said to me: 'I'll have to get an electrician to put the plug on'. In the end, I found it easier to take on those tasks myself.

"He was a convivial man. He loved the company of other men. All those years spent touring, I suppose. He shared a room with Trevor Bailey, the former player turned cricket commentator, and their room was always chaos thanks to Denis. He would come home with half of Trevor's things and Trevor would go home with his. As for the memorabilia of his life, I think he lost most of it, or gave it away. I don't really remember how we came to get married. He was terribly charming. I started going out with him and somehow ended up becoming wife No 3.

"But he had another side to him. Bagenal always said he was the most introverted extrovert he had ever met. He kept a lot to himself. On the surface he was always very outgoing, very bubbly. But there were depths to him. He suffered terrible frustration as he got older that he was unable to do as much as he used to. I always remember him saying to me that at charity matches people always expected him to go and play as he did in his heyday. That was difficult for him. But he always maintained his great attraction to women. I would say I had to manage him in that regard with difficulty. He used to say those stories about him arriving late for matches in his dinner suit were 'Lies. All lies'," Christine laughed, "but I don't think they were."

Like Alex James, the life of Denis Compton shaded into showbusiness. He was George Best without the addictions, without the dark, deadly side, that so ravaged the Irish genius. Compton vastly enjoyed his drink – "He imbibed on a grand scale," noted Sir Stanley Matthews – but never in a manner to threaten his health or his sanity. Compton lived a life geared to fun not doom.

Only war foiled the plans of Denis and a few of his fellow Arsenal players to star at the London Palladium. Ted Drake, the Arsenal and England striker, recalled: "Denis was one of six of us at Arsenal who auditioned at the Palladium with a head-tennis act. Cliff Bastin, George Male, Eddie Hapgood, Denis, his brother Les and I worked out a routine in training in which we mixed ball-juggling with heading. A Palladium impresario read a report about it in a

newspaper and invited us along to test it out on stage. He was sufficiently impressed to offer us £100 a week between us for a down-the-bill act. This, remember, when we were all on just £8 a week wages." Then war broke out, relieving the theatre-going public of the threat.

The Compton brothers achieved an extraordinary double in 1948. Arsenal won the League Championship and Middlesex won the county cricket title. There seemed no end to the sporting honours that would befall these men, one so skilful, speedy and unpredictable on the football field, the other so strong, dependable and powerful. By now Les was known as 'Big Head', not for any inflated sense of self-importance but because his head was his principle instrument of business during his long career with Arsenal (1931-1952). In one match during the war, he had scored 10 goals against Clapham Orient, six with his head.

The sporting brothers had gone their separate sporting ways by now. Denis to cricket and Les to football. Tours to Australia, South Africa, and the sub-Continent required Denis to be away in the winter, especially as the England team travelled by boat, adding six weeks to the length of the trips. Denis Compton's Test cricket career lasted 20 years (1937-1957), a glittering trail of runs and strokes and crumpled dinner jackets. He scored 5,708 runs in 131 innings and made 17 centuries for an average of over 50. In the end, as with football, his injured knee forced him into retirement.

"He always had terrible trouble with his knee," Christine said. "In the end, his hips went too. That was the trouble with sport in that era. There were fewer physios and men just got on with playing. It is unbelievable how many cricketers ended up so arthritic. Obviously I didn't know Denis in his playing days. By the time I married him, he had long retired but he always retained his strong views on sport. He didn't much like the modern game. He hated the protective head gear the cricketers started to wear. He didn't approve at all of the Packer revolution and he would have been astounded that an Arsenal team would ever take to the field without a single English footballer. He was an absolute patriot. It was appropriate really that he should have died on St George's Day."

Denis Compton died on April 23, 1997, at the age of 78. The tributes flowed in, the obituaries were paeans of praise. One sportsman had captivated a whole generation. Benny Green, the multi-talented entertainer and broadcaster, put it best. "Denis Compton was the summer of our lives," he wrote. The Memorial Service was held at Westminster Abbey and was attended by sports lovers of all parties, teams and loyalties. Peter Hill-Wood, the chairman, represented Arsenal. John Major, the former Prime Minister, along with Colin Cowdrey, Keith Miller, the former Aussie bowler then desperately frail himself, Godfrey Evans, Mike

Gatting, Cliff Morgan and Sir Garfield Sobers were among the cast paying homage to their friend and hero.

Leslie Compton had died at the age of 72 on December 27, 1984. He had formed one of the most remarkable brotherly double acts British sport has ever seen. "Leslie Compton, A Pillar of the Arsenal Defence," ran the *Telegraph* obituary, which went on to give him great credit as a sportsman in his own right, not merely as the sibling of his outrageously talented brother. "As a stalwart centre-half who, in an emergency, could be moved up to centre-forward, he was a pillar of the Arsenal defence in the 1930s and 1940s. His sporting activities did not end with his retirement from football in the 1955 season, for he later played bowls at a high level. For some years he was landlord of a public house on Highgate Hill." To accompany the story, the paper ran a picture of Leslie in his Arsenal prime, nearly as impossibly handsome as his brother.

**Sue Mott**

# Gentleman Jack takes up the challenge

Coaching still remained an almost unknown art in England in the immediate years following World War II. Perceptive men such as Jesse Carver, George Raynor and Jimmy Hagan, conscious of the rise of the continental game through applied coaching, were recognised largely only abroad, being viewed at home with suspicion and finding employment opportunities rare. The attitude of famous players, such as Stanley Matthews, Tom Finney, Len Shackleton, Wilf Mannion and others, masters of the ball, were convinced without conceit that their knowledge of the game exceeded that of coaches, who as players had probably performed at a lower level. Coaching, they reasoned, was needed only for poorer players. There was as yet no true concept in England of integrated play – as had been revealed, sensationally, by Hungary in 1953. They won 6-3 at Wembley, the first foreigners to defeat England at home.

Characteristic was the attitude of modest Arthur Milton, a naturally gifted footballer wholly governed by instinct, who by 1956 had left the game to concentrate on his cricket with Gloucestershire. "Coaching? I've never believed in it too much, but perhaps it was easy for me. I believe the game's born in you, given to you, and the coach's job is not to spoil it." One or two managers working in England were more aware, notably Arthur Rowe at Tottenham Hotspur. Rowe, having studied in Hungary before the war, was now studiously applying what he had learnt with singular effect. Yet by and large, in spite of the embarrassment inflicted by the magical Magyars, the majority of Football League clubs continued in contented isolation from the rest of the world, hugging the traditional physical fortitudes, as exemplified by Wolverhampton Wanderers under Stan Cullis. This was an illusion that would not be dented until the dramas of the new European Cup, and glittering displays from the likes of Real Madrid, Barcelona and Reims were thrust upon English consciousness.

Another young coach already to have got the message was Ron Greenwood, never mind that he had been a pedestrian defender with Bradford City when lowering Arsenal's colours in the FA Cup third round in the 1947/1948 season.



Greenwood was shortly to be appointed coach at Highbury, a landmark event, yet even his influence would be insufficient to halt Arsenal's slide away from the forefront of the game for another 13 years.

In the division of responsibilities, with Bob Wall promoted as general secretary, Jack Crayston's role as manager was not confirmed until December in the 1956/1957 season. Crayston had won eight England caps before the war, another of Arsenal's robust midfield players, known within the Club as 'Gentleman Jack', a kind, undemonstrative northerner. He was in the then traditional role of Highbury officialdom: loyal to the Club to the point of obsession, hard working, considerate to the administrative staff and players alike. In his opening season, with 25 League goals from Derek Tapscott and another 12 from the emerging David Herd, a final placing of fifth behind Manchester United was far from unsatisfactory, while a moderate run in the Cup was halted in a sixth-round replay against West Bromwich Albion.

In early 1957, Don Roper made his way back to Southampton after 10 years' service and almost 300 First Division appearances. Two months later, on March 13, George Allison died after several years of ill health; coincidentally the following day JW Julian, Club captain in the 1890s at Woolwich and a regular spectator at Highbury, also passed on.

At this time Greenwood, beginning to make his way, was working with the England youth team, spending one day a week coaching Oxford University and spending three days a week with Eastbourne United in the Metropolitan League. Wall was one of a growing number of League club secretaries in tune with modern trends, and following consultation with the Arsenal board and the FA, made an approach to Greenwood in November 1957 to become the first full-time coach at Highbury. The erudite Greenwood agreed, on condition that he remain in charge of Eastbourne so long as they continued in the FA Amateur Cup. This meant that he trained and prepared the Arsenal team for matches, but then rejoined Eastbourne on Saturdays. It so happened that both clubs went out of their respective cup competitions at the first attempt, Arsenal losing 3-1 away to lowly Northampton Town on January 3, 1958.

For all Greenwood's enthusiasm, he found himself confronted at Highbury with old-fashioned thinking and out-of-date tactics: for instance, that the wing-halves – by now, under Crayston, Cliff Holton and Peter Goring – were not expected to cross the half-way line. "My job was to convince all the players that there were different ways of doing things – perhaps even better ways," Greenwood recalled in his autobiography, *Yours Sincerely*. "Players were set in their outlook and it took me about six months before I really felt that I had got my message across. It was not before time. Things had gone rather sour at

Highbury and I knew it was up to me to sort matters out."

In spite of his attempted revision of attitudes, in 1957/1958 Arsenal finished a disappointing 12th, with their lowest points total since 1930 and an alarming 85 goals conceded. This was despite the fact that Crayston had appointed as captain Dave Bowen, bought from Northampton in 1950 and as dogged a wing-half as Mercer. Though Crayston was constantly attempting to strengthen the squad, his hands were partially tied by the board's refusal to enter transfer bidding contests. They would only enquire about the fee demanded for any player, then consider whether or not they were prepared to pay that amount. In this way, for instance, the Club failed to sign Cliff Jones, a young Swansea City winger, who ended up with rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

One of the highlights of the season was the home meeting with Manchester United on February 1. This was five days before the tragic air crash at Munich as United returned from their European Cup second-round tie against Red Star in Belgrade. It was the last occasion on which Matt Busby's sumptuous array of youthful talent would exhibit their seemingly limitless potential to become possibly the greatest British team of all time, notwithstanding anything that might be achieved in later years by Spurs, Arsenal, Liverpool, Celtic or United themselves. Within 10 minutes United had taken the lead as Duncan Edwards, that massive oak of a player who had made his England debut at the age of 18, thrashed the ball beyond Jack Kelsey's reach from outside the penalty area. Before half-time, United, totally in charge, were three in front, with further goals from Bobby Charlton, hammering an explosive drive at the end of a long run by Albert Scanlon, and Tommy Taylor, sweeping home another after exchanged crosses between Kenny Morgans and Scanlon. Of Charlton's goal, Don Davies of the *Manchester Guardian*, one of those who was to perish in the crash, wrote: "R. Charlton has grown from a limited left-side player into a brilliant inside-forward." Over the next four years, Charlton, one of those thankfully to survive the disaster, would fluctuate between inside-forward for his club and an exhilarating outside-left for his country.

It was now that Greenwood intervened. "We were being over-run by sheer quality," he recalled. "I went into the dressing room at halftime and said 'You're so busy worrying about their forwards, you're forgetting their defence can be opened up. Let's be positive, let's take the game to them. We've nothing to lose, so let's have a go'." The gamble succeeded. United were forced into errors, and Herd and Jimmy Bloomfield, the latter scoring twice, made it 3-3.

Yet United still had gears in hand. Demonstrating their lofty horizons, they accelerated, the velvet-footed Dennis Viollet and Taylor restoring their lead to 5-3. Derek Tapscott made it 5-4 and the Highbury crowd, without being aware of

what fate had in store, had witnessed a glorious game that could never be repeated.

Of United's team that day, five were to die the following Thursday: Roger Byrne, England's captain and left-back, the entire half-back line of Eddie Colman, Mark Jones and Edwards, and Taylor. Three reserves also would perish, inside-forward Bill Whelan, outside-left David Pegg and reserve left-back Geoff Bent. Charlton was to be miraculously hurled from the plane into a field still strapped into his seat. Johnny Berry, Jackie Blanchflower and Scanlon all received injuries that would curtail their careers. Goalkeeper Harry Gregg and full-back Bill Foulkes would heroically help rescue survivors from the stricken plane. Viollet and reserve goalkeeper Ray Wood also survived uninjured. Matt Busby, with multiple fractures and his lung punctured, hovered close to death but pulled through, ultimately to lead United to England's first triumph in the European Cup 10 years later.

Greenwood and his wife Lucy had planned to have a foreign holiday at the end of the season, but cancelled the trip when Crayston was dismissed, Greenwood calculating that he, too, might be out of a job and needing to economise. As ever, many names were linked with the job, including former player Joe Mercer, by now manager of Sheffield United, and former Blackpool and England centre-half Harry Johnstone, manager of Reading. At one stage Greenwood was approached by Wall, posing the possibility that he, Wall, might become general manager with Greenwood elevated to team manager. Whatever the substance of this idea, it was rejected by the board on the grounds of Greenwood's inexperience. He was also approached by Eric Taylor, Sheffield Wednesday's progressive general manager, but, finding himself on a seemingly secure platform at Highbury, decided to pursue his interests there – never mind that on appointment George Swindin publicly announced he intended to impose many changes at Highbury. Though privately unnerved by Swindin's apparent dismissal of all his work up to now, Greenwood stuck to his cause, and accepted in good faith Swindin's subsequent apology, protesting that his comments had not been specifically directed against the coach.

One of Greenwood's first moves in the 1958/1959 season was to advise Swindin to purchase Tommy Docherty, the tearaway Scotland wing-half who was in dispute with Preston North End. Greenwood had encountered Docherty at a summer coaching course at the Lilleshall National Training Centre. "George, I discovered, was a dynamic sort of chap," Greenwood related in his autobiography. "Full of personality, a real enthusiast who cared deeply about Arsenal ... His part in preparing the team was basically a team talk on Friday morning. His outlook was never deeply tactical but he was a good motivator ... I

felt strongly that it was my job to know what he wanted ... we were on the same wavelength. I told him about Tommy, and he bought him without delay, and by November we were at the top of the First Division. Our ideas and the players were in harmony."

Docherty's rift with Preston had involved his selection for Scotland's World Cup squad for Sweden. Preston's manager, the former elegant wing-half Cliff Britton, was adamant, in the authoritarian manner of that time, that Docherty must accompany the club on a close-season tour of South Africa. Docherty, with characteristic gusto and vocabulary to match, told Britton he was going to Sweden and would be leaving Preston when he returned. "The World Cup proved to be a disaster," Docherty relates. "We didn't win a single game and I didn't kick a ball [Scotland drew with Yugoslavia, then lost to Paraguay and France]. So the row with Preston proved a futile one ... but after the row I decided I had to go anyway." Britton retaliated by dropping Docherty for the opening match of the season – which was against Arsenal. Immediately after the game, Swindin called him to the office and literally within minutes he was transferred for a fee of £20,000, certainly a convenient move from Britton's standpoint, with his player removed almost as far as possible from an appreciative and protesting crowd at Deepdale.

Docherty swiftly stamped his class at Highbury, scoring the third goal in a 3-0 win over Burnley on his debut, and within weeks the rampaging Scot had become a firm favourite on the Highbury terraces. There soon followed six-goal crushings of Everton and Bolton Wanderers, and four-goal defeats of Manchester City and West Bromwich Albion. Docherty's drive alongside Bowen in midfield was helping to bring the best out of the creative Bloomfield and the goal-poaching David Herd. Supporters revelled in a 4-1 victory over Spurs in the New Year immediately prior to Docherty's two-week suspension for comments directed at the referee following the 6-3 Boxing Day defeat to Luton Town at Kenilworth Road. Injuries during the final run-in restricted title ambitions, but Arsenal finished third, their highest position since winning the title six years earlier. Docherty was generous regarding Greenwood's contribution. "Ron really influenced the end of my playing career, and even more my ideas on management," he says. "He taught me so much about passing and movement, controlling the ball with chest and thigh, using the outside of the foot. He loved attacking football. George [Swindin] didn't do a lot with us, he was from a specialist position and didn't really have much hold on the team. I never seriously thought we could be near to winning anything at Highbury, perhaps a Cup run."

There was a more generous attitude towards the goalkeeper-manager from

one of the young players that Swindin brought to the Club. George Armstrong, who would develop into a cornerstone of Arsenal's great team of the late Sixties, was particularly grateful. "I thought George was a great guy," said Armstrong, sadly to suffer a premature death while coaching at Arsenal's training ground complex at London Colney. "He was superb; to me he was a father-figure, I had great respect for him. But if you were a minute late, God help you."

An expensive addition by Swindin in 1959/1960 was Mel Charles, brother of John, from Swansea City, a player with the same superb physique and equally capable of performing in attack or defence, but without the refinement and tactical instincts of Big John. A more significant move in the long run – following the retirement of long-serving physiotherapist Billy Milne, Whittaker's successor – was the appointment of Bertie Mee. This came about almost inadvertently when Greenwood, believing Jimmy Bloomfield was not receiving a correct diagnosis/treatment for an injured knee, took him independently for a consultation at a clinic run by Mee at Camden Town. His career as a winger cut short by injury, Mee had spent the war in the Royal Army Medical Corps, followed by rehabilitation work at Camden. Greenwood was reprimanded by the Club, but reconsideration by Wall and the directors led to Mee's appointment and ultimately the transformation of Club fortunes some years later. It was, however, to be an unhappy season for Arsenal: Charles less than dominant, goalkeeper Kelsey troubled by injuries and repeatedly replaced by Jim Standen, and Docherty suffering a broken ankle against his old club Preston in October – at a time when Arsenal were a well-placed fourth. From the end of that month to February 6, the team went without a home win and relegation became a possibility. Dennis Evans at full-back was an additional injury worry, Charles had problems with a knee, and in an attempt to sign the prodigal Denis Law from Huddersfield Town, Arsenal were outbid by Manchester City. They finished 13th in the table, with a worrying goal aggregate of 68-80, disillusionment deepened by elimination in the opening round of the FA Cup by lowly Rotherham United, at Hillsborough in a second replay.

Amid all this confusion, there was a dividing of ways between Swindin and Greenwood. "It was apparent, alas, that George and I were not a perfect partnership," Greenwood related. "There was no personal animosity, and as people we got on reasonably well, but we were two very different personalities. The chemistry was not right. Jimmy Bloomfield once told me 'until I read what George has said in the papers every morning I can't enjoy my toast and marmalade'. Any reporter stuck for a line could get one from George." For a while they experimented with Greenwood confining himself to the reserve team, Kelsey later telling Greenwood that whatever he might have said in preparation

for a particular match, Swindin would say something different. When the offer came for Greenwood to take charge at West Ham, it was one he could not refuse. In his three seasons with Arsenal, they had finished 12th, 3rd and 13th. He had, coincidentally, latterly been appointed manager of the England Under-23 team, handling such outstanding young players as Jimmy Greaves, Peter Dobing, Maurice Setters, Jimmy Armfield, Bobby Charlton and George Eastham.

On returning home from Arsenal's summer tour of 1960, Greenwood was distressed to learn that Wilf Taylor, Newcastle United's director and a FA Council member who had been on the Under-23 tour, had suggested that Greenwood had made an illegal approach to Eastham. Although it was known that Arsenal wished to sign Eastham from Newcastle, Greenwood was categorical in his denial of any such clandestine negotiation. Eastham, a lightweight but superbly skilled inside-forward, had requested a transfer and been refused. In consequence, he challenged the employment system on which English professional football was based: the right of a club to retain the registration of any player so long as it wished, thereby potentially being able to put a player out of the game if he refused to play for them. This Eastham now did for some five months, in the interim moving to London where he was given employment as a salesman by a sympathetic benefactor, Ernie Clay, later a controversial chairman of Fulham. Eastham refused Newcastle's offer to allow him to live and train in London.

Supported by the Professional Footballers' Association, under the chairmanship of Jimmy Hill, a Fulham inside-forward, Eastham was contesting not only the transfer retain system but also that of the maximum wage. The absurdity was that Newcastle could transfer him for £50,000 while all he would receive was a regulation £20 signing-on fee and, over 15 years' service, a possible £3,000 in bonuses on top of a maximum weekly wage of £20. Finally, in November, Newcastle relented, Eastham moving to Highbury for a fee of £47,500. Arsenal had offered a package including the switch north of David Herd. That fell through, but despite scoring 29 goals in 40 League matches in the 1960/1961 season, a disillusioned Herd would move at the end of the season to Manchester United.

The maximum wage restriction would not be broken until the following year, and the retain iniquity not abolished until 1963, but Eastham's move unhappily proved not to be the answer to all ills for Arsenal in 1960/1961. Docherty, who had been offered to Blackpool to help finance the Newcastle deal, had dogmatically asserted that if he was finished with Arsenal he would hang up his boots. He played his last match in February 1961, before crossing London to become coach at Chelsea under manager Ted Drake at the age of 32. Cup interest

ended at the first attempt, the team losing 2-1 away to Sunderland, and for all the ingenuity of Eastham in midfield together with Vic Groves – by now Club captain following the departure of Bowen back to Northampton Town – performances remained predominantly unimpressive. Dissatisfaction was magnified by the mounting glory down the road at White Hart Lane, where Bill Nicholson's team, inspired by the skills of Danny Blanchflower, Dave Mackay and John White, were heading for the first Cup and League Double of the 20th century. Misgivings for manager Swindin were heightened by successive defeats in the last three games of the season, conceding 12 goals against Chelsea, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Everton.

Matters improved little in 1961/1962. With the maximum wage finally gone, and Johnny Haynes, the maestro at Fulham, becoming the first player to be offered £100 a week, the Highbury boardroom was initially embarrassed when Eastham rejected the offered terms: a basic £30, plus £10 for each first-team appearance, £4 for a win, £1 for each thousand on the gate between 35,000 and 45,000, and £2 per thousand above. In other words, £64 for winning at home in front of 50,000. Eastham and Mel Charles both at first rejected the offer, then relented. There were some poor performances away from home in the autumn, conceding four goals at West Bromwich Albion and Everton. Manchester United scored the only goal at Old Trafford in the fourth round of the Cup, and an unhappy Swindin shuffled towards a predictable end of his tenure.

Sir Bracewell Smith having retired as chairman, the job of terminating Swindin's contract fell to his successor, Denis Hill-Wood, son of former chairman Samuel. He handled the situation less than smoothly, Swindin learning of the decision, though he no doubt expected it, when reading a newspaper-boarding headline at Euston Station. The players found out after the final home defeat to Everton. There was the sad and sorry sight of Groves and young Armstrong, who by now had come into the side at outside-left in place of Alan Skirton, sitting quietly crying in the tea-room, together with the tea-lady. "He'd done a lot for me," said Armstrong.

The appointment of Swindin's successor was little more of a surprise than his dismissal. Billy Wright, England youth team manager under the aegis of Walter Winterbottom – the FA's director of coaching and under whose team management he had gained 105 caps – was handed the role of reviving the fallen giant in a blaze of publicity. Nobody paused to consider, however, that Wright was entirely without management experience. He had been England's captain with impeccable character credentials, but it had been as leader by example rather than by any intellectual or technical direction. Billy was essentially 'Mr Nice Guy', friend to all, inspirational captain of Wolves, emotionally

undemonstrative, alien to any kind of controversy.

Stanley Matthews used to tell the story of England team talks under Winterbottom, who at the end of delivering his pre-match analysis would turn to Wright and say: "Anything to add, skipper?" Wright would invariably reply: "No, Walter, I think you've said it all." When England were given a pasting at Wembley by Hungary eight years earlier, neither Winterbottom, despite the fact that he studied Hungary's tactics prior to the meeting, nor Wright, had the slightest clue at half-time as to how they might revise their tactics. Wright was an ambassadorial figure, ready-made for diplomatic duties, but not the ruthless cut-and-thrust of football management, and the daily dilemmas that require decisions unsparing of the emotions and careers of individual players.

But there was to be a brave new world in 1962/1963, and he immediately went out and bought one of the most brilliant players of the Sixties. Joe Baker, who had the contorted background of being a Liverpoolian who made his name in Scotland with Hibernian, was signed from Torino for £70,000. He had already played four times for England in 1960, the first man to do so while playing outside the country. Simultaneously, Wright appointed Les Shannon, the former Burnley player now working with Everton, as Club coach. Shannon was well-versed in theory but as yet did not have a notable platform of achievement. With Geoff Strong and John Barnwell as alternating inside-forwards and Terry Neill emerging as a useful wing-half, Arsenal quickly became a side attractive going forward but suspect in defence. This was not aided by the retirement of Jack Kelsey. His replacement, Jack McClelland, was anything but his equal, and though Baker celebrated his arrival with 29 goals, alongside 18 by Strong, a goal aggregate of 86-77 could lift Arsenal no higher than seventh behind title winners Everton who, by contrast, conceded only a goal a game in 42.

The close season prior to 1963/1964 was noted by the arrival at Highbury of a centre-half in the traditional British mould, big, square and a bit ponderous. Ian Ure, from Scotland, was committed and well-intentioned, but neither he nor Neill, nor Laurie Brown, a former England and Olympic amateur from Northampton, could sufficiently steady the boat at the back, where this time 90 goals were let through, despite repeated changes between the posts. McClelland, Ian McKechnie and Bob Wilson, from Loughborough University, another amateur, were all supplanted by the anxiety-driven signing of Jim Furnell. The glitter would continue up front, the glitches at the back. Baker and Strong scored 26 each, but as early as the second home game, a 3-2 win over West Bromwich, it was apparent that pre-season training under Wright and Shannon had not yet produced a durable formula.

More permanent had been the decision in the High Court on July 4, when Mr



Justice Wilberforce, ruling on the case of Eastham v Newcastle United, judged in favour of independence for players in the terms of their employment. There would now be negotiable contracts with a finite end. The clubs' effective slave trade was at last buried. Meanwhile, Eastham would make 33 appearances, playing at times in harmony with Baker as though they were a two-man team unconnected with the other labouring nine. Such an occasion was the home match with Bolton in early September when Arsenal, having lost three of their first four matches, found themselves 3-1 down at half-time. Eastham and Baker were largely responsible for turning it into a 4-3 victory, but the writing of an uncertain season was already on the wall. As Wright would admit: "I began to realise that I had some senior players who did not want to play. They wanted to do well for themselves, but they weren't Arsenal through and through. I wanted types who lived for the Club. By continuing the good work started by George [Swindin] with the youth policy, I could see the potential in the youngsters who were coming through."

Laurie Brown epitomised Wright's misgivings. In January, having been dropped from wing-half where he had been switched to accommodate Ure in the centre, he ran off home to his parents in Durham, without even telling his wife, frustrated at his demotion. He was fortunate indeed to have been rated at that time as worth £35,000, and his temperamental reaction was good for neither him nor the Club. For professionalism, he had only to glance at the displays of Eastham who, though incessantly kicked in every direction by the opposition, never gave less than maximum effort.

Desperate in his search for equilibrium, in April 1964 Wright signed his veteran England colleague Don Howe, a one-club right-back with West Bromwich Albion. Could Howe, with experience of a team which had been in the front line in the mid-Fifties, help establish stability? His signing came after the transfer deadline, so his debut was in the opening match of 1964/1965, away to Bill Shankly's increasingly strident Liverpool side. Though Arsenal lost 3-2, there were indications that there could be a turn in fortunes. In the long term, the only significance of this game was that Geoff Strong sufficiently impressed Shankly to attract a transfer bid that would see him move to Anfield and collect an FA Cup winner's medal at the end of the season. Consistency continued to be elusive for Arsenal, with seven defeats in 11 matches between September 26 and November 28.

A further move by Wright had been the acquisition in October of Frank McLintock, the dynamic if volatile wing-half from Leicester City. Then and now, McLintock was outspoken, an inspirational figure who would eventually become a cornerstone in one of Arsenal's most memorable teams. For the

moment, he was to share only in the frustration. "Unfortunately, Billy Wright and Les Shannon were two inexperienced people taking over a massive Club. I felt sorry for them. It was a shambles, and they were grasping at straws. The training was too hard, systems were not in place, there was no knowing what they expected of you. They were very tough on the youngsters, like Jon Sammels, George Armstrong and John Radford, while the older set got away with things.

"I genuinely felt sad for Billy, too big a job too soon for a new man. Coming into management, you need to learn the trade. When things go downhill, you're under turmoil, not in a position to turn them around. I experienced the same with Leicester, Billy and I were both playing at the top level until we were 37. Other managers, like Ron Greenwood and Terry Venables, started learning on coaching courses earlier. Yet I'd immediately realised on arrival what a big club this was, what aristocrats they were – the oak panelling of Bob Wall's office, flying in two planes when travelling abroad because of the risk of a crash, the heated changing room floors, the X-ray machines in the treatment room, the floor so clean you could have had an operation on it – things you never saw at any other club."

For all McLintock's contribution, Arsenal sank to 13th place behind Manchester United and suffered another wretched elimination from the Cup at the hands of Peterborough United from the Third Division. It was a moment that defined Wright's lack of authority. Not that he sidestepped responsibility. Quite the reverse. "I select the team and I must take the flak," he admitted afterwards. "The side will be unchanged for next Saturday's League match against Chelsea." In fact, there was one change, Neill coming in for McLintock at right-half, but the match was lost 2-1, a scoreline repeated at home to Leeds United in the next match. Public tolerance was at breaking point. Wright, crucially, should have asserted himself in the dressing room, but he did not have the temperament to challenge his players. Though without conceit, Wright was addicted to popularity and would do anything to avoid confrontation.

The departure of Strong, as striking partner for Baker, left the team seriously under-equipped for the 1965/1966 season, and the omens bleak for Wright. Though one or two of the younger players, such as Armstrong, Sammels, Peter Storey and the tenacious Radford broke through – Radford scored eight times in 32 League appearances – a lack of conviction remained. Team changes were multiple: six players, for instance, being used at left-half alone: Neill, McLintock, David Court, Simpson, John Walley and Ure. There was a tame exit in the Cup away to Blackburn Rovers, and a miserable spell either side of Christmas with five defeats in six games.

Goalkeeper Bob Wilson had deep sympathy for a nice man wrongly in the

managerial seat. "I don't want it to be interpreted in the wrong way, but I think that Billy's health would have suffered eventually," said Wilson, who on retirement developed a successful career in television. "He was too nice, and I think he felt a failure because he'd been so successful as a player. He was a lovely guy. If I took my family or relations or some kids to the ground, and he was the other side of the pitch, he would come over and say 'Hello, I'm Billy Wright, the manager'. He was brilliant like that, he wanted to greet everybody, but as a manager, without being too cruel, he just did not come up to it."

As the season tottered towards the inevitable – Arsenal dropping 17 points out of the last possible 24 – attendances plummeted. For a home draw with West Bromwich in early April there were 8,738 spectators, the lowest Highbury attendance since the war, as apathy overtook the terraces. The penultimate game was at home to high-riding Leeds United; on the same evening Liverpool were playing Borussia Dortmund at Hampden Park in the Cup Winners' Cup Final, a match shown live on television. A pitiful 4,544 witnessed a 3-0 defeat, the smallest First Division crowd since World War I. Arsenal's misery tended to be overlooked, away from Highbury, on account of the imminence of the World Cup. However, in the Arsenal boardroom and, while Wright took a holiday as the drums began to roll for England at Wembley, an unusual, though in one sense predictable, decision was taken. Wright, like George Allison, was to be replaced by the physiotherapist, little Bertie Mee. Wright, when informed of his dismissal, was distraught. His wife, Joy Beverley, one of the then-popular singing trio, the Beverley Sisters, was furious, regarding Denis Hill-Wood as heartless. Hill-Wood would admit privately that he, too, feared for Wright's health. Yet typically Wright took the blow on the chin and rode it manfully. "It was heartbreaking. Maybe I was too nice, but that's the way I am. I wanted so much to make Arsenal great again, and did feel that with the young players we were moving along the right lines."

The long-term situation had promise. Besides the bevy of young players already mentioned, one of Wright's last acts was to sign a meteoric Charlie George from schoolboy soccer in May that year. But youth team performances do not keep a current first team in the First Division. Hill-Wood and his colleagues had no option.

In defence of his action, Hill-Wood stated: "Billy is a 22-carat gold person, but both his position and mine had become impossible. We were receiving hundreds of letters demanding his dismissal, there was growing unrest among the supporters ... when I called Billy in to give him the news, he made it easy for me. 'I know what you want me for', he said, before I could say a word. There were no hard feelings. Billy knows that he will always be very welcome at

Highbury. He is a marvellous chap."

**David Miller**

# Matthews amazes Highbury faithful

If Arsenal were searching for fresh stardom in the mid-Fifties, as some of their old-stagers went into relative decline, there was one memorable occasion when the Highbury crowd stood in awe ... of Stanley Matthews. Five years earlier, the maestro had had the football nation spellbound as he contrived Blackpool's last-ditch victory over injury-hit Bolton Wanderers in the 1953 FA Cup Final, masterminding the winning goal in added time. The following season he had mesmerised West Germany's defence when England met the recent World Cup holders in a friendly at Wembley. He had destroyed Werner Kohlmeyer, the captain and left-back, the 100,000 crowd laughing out loud as Matthews toyed with his opponent like a cat with a ball of wool. In November 1958 he came once more to Highbury, now in his 44th year. There had been no pre-match expectation beforehand because Matthews had only just returned from a brief coaching trip to South Africa, Blackpool treating their elder statesman with flexible licence, grateful merely for his occasional continuing genius. He unexpectedly appeared in the lounge of Blackpool's hotel in London, whereupon a delighted Joe Smith, the manager, asked only if he was fit before adding him to the line-up.

Arsenal's team that winter day had indomitable Jack Kelsey in goal, behind fullbacks Len Wills and Dennis Evans. Dynamic Tommy Docherty, following his transfer from Preston North End in August, alongside centrehalf Bill Dodgin, with young John Petts standing in at left-half for veteran Dave Bowen, Wales's hero in the summer's World Cup in Sweden. Up front were Denis Clapton and Joe Haverty on the wings, and John Barnwell, Tony Biggs and Above Striker David Herd, signed by Arsenal in 1954, rises high to fine tune his heading technique at the Club's training ground in Colney, Hertfordshire Right Stanley Matthews turns on the style to torment the Arsenal defence Jimmy Bloomfield the inside-forwards. It was George Swindin's first season as manager and Arsenal were to finish a respectable third in the First Division, but on this day they received one of the exhibitions of their careers, as the stately veteran gave unhappy left-back Evans a nightmare afternoon and Blackpool ran out 4-1 winners, their first victory at Highbury for many years. The maestro would

continue playing in the First Division until he was 50, by then having transferred back to Stoke City and become the first active professional to be knighted. Incredibly, he had appeared for England in one of their qualifying games against Denmark in the spring of 1958, his colleague Tom Finney being of the opinion he should have been included in the squad for the finals.

It was not the first time that Matthews had tormented an Arsenal defence. Eight years earlier the Arsenal side had boasted some of the most accomplished defenders in the game – Walley Barnes, Leslie Compton and Lionel Smith – not to mention Alex Forbes and Joe Mercer at wing-half, with Ian McPherson, James Logie, Peter Goring, Doug Lishman and Don Roper up front. Yet Matthews had proceeded to give a devastating performance in a spectacular 4-4 draw. Jackie Mudie, his colleague at insideforward and himself a wily international with Scotland, was as dazzled as the opposition. Once, when Matthews stood stationary with his foot on the ball, not a single Arsenal player had ventured to go to try to take it off him. They had already attempted to do so too often, to their own embarrassment. Five different Arsenal players had tried at one time or another to shackle this ageing legend, including ultimately Roper, his opposing winger. Nobody could touch him. His wizardry brought a standing ovation as he was applauded from the field at the end. Mudie recalled: "It was one of the greatest games I ever saw Stan play, and afterwards he just got in the bath as if nothing had happened. He simply didn't realise what he had done, the grip he had exerted not just on Arsenal but on the whole crowd." Tom Whittaker and rival manager Smith were equal in admiration. "I've never seen him play so well – at 35, it's astonishing," Whittaker said. Smith added: "I've seen Stan play brilliantly many times, but seldom anything like that."

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **The rebel with a cause**



**The stars of today's Premiership all owe a debt to George Eastham, the diminutive forward who dared to tackle the football establishment in pursuit of fair play over contracts**

Whatever his achievements, it is inevitable that George Eastham will be remembered for one particular feat. It didn't come on the pitch, where a cultured left foot always had plenty to say, but in London's High Court where a landmark ruling changed the face of English football. Eastham, in effect, was the Jean-Marc Bosman of his time. A determined, single-minded individual, this diminutive inside forward challenged and overturned the prevailing order when he took Newcastle United to court claiming restraint of trade. Unlike Bosman, though, who drifted into sad and bitter obscurity following his famous breakthrough, Eastham eventually managed, after an agonising wait, to capitalize on his stand. All of his 19 England caps were won during a six-year spell at Arsenal that might not have reaped any trophies, but certainly enhanced the playmaker's reputation; made his name, too, as a character of substance.

Prior to Eastham's intervention, the old "retain and transfer" system meant that clubs held all the cards, allowing them to keep hold of a player's registration indefinitely. The subservient serf was helpless to move on without the express say-so of his all-powerful employer. The situation was intolerable, ripe for legal challenge, but it would take a brave man to make the first move. Step forward Eastham, who had been unhappy for some time at St James' Park when, in December 1959, he hand-delivered a transfer request to the Newcastle chairman's home. When the board flatly refused the request, Eastham took his case to the Football League Management Committee. Receiving no joy there, he boldly withdrew his labour, effectively going on strike, and enlisted the help of the Professional Footballers' Association. It caused a national furore, with not everyone coming out on the player's side. Tom Finney advised the protagonist to "lay his pistol down". Another famous name, Wilf Mannion, who had unsuccessfully fought Middlesbrough in a similar action, urged Eastham to give it up. "You can't win!" he claimed.

Despite the scepticism, the man labelled "a rebel with a cause" resolutely pressed on. With no money coming in, he was forced to move south and accept a rep's job. Anxious to keep fit, the outcast trained with Redhill FC, a local non-league side. Back on Tyneside, meanwhile, George's wife, Wendy, was bearing the brunt. Sitting on the bus, she would hear the cutting comments. "That bloody Eastham," people muttered. "Who does he think he is?"

Listening to such stories down the phone proved far from easy but, gritting his teeth, Eastham continued holding out for what he believed in. As history records, such determination eventually paid off when Newcastle, perhaps nudged into action by the serving of a writ, accepted Arsenal's £47,500 offer, the second biggest fee in the London club's history. "Worth his Weight in Gold!" the headlines exclaimed. For Eastham, it had been a long and tortuous journey – five months in exile on a point of principle. But while the maximum wage had inadvertently been abolished, the old transfer rules were still legally in place. Determined to see the job through, Eastham persisted with his claim, finally winning out in 1963 when football's antiquated laws got properly overhauled. "Eastham versus Newcastle United" in the High Court resulted in a much fairer practice based on negotiated contracts.

Speaking from his home in South Africa, the victor casts his mind back to those pioneering days. "It was a frightening experience sat in the dock having QCs throwing questions at you," he recalls. "But at least I knew I had right on my side. That's what kept me going." A chip off the old block. His father must have been proud. A former footballer himself, George "Diddler" Eastham had always emphasised the importance of sticking to your guns. Rather unlucky to win only one England cap during a successful career spanning Bolton Wanderers, Brentford and Blackpool, his father had proved a pretty hard taskmaster during Eastham's schooldays. One poor performance and the comeback was blunt. "Do you want to be a bricklayer? Like to be a joiner? OK, just carry on playing like that!" In reality, that was never going to happen. From an early age growing up in Blackpool, young George clearly had talent and it was a proud moment for the family, then, when the 17-year-old turned out alongside his dad for Northern Irish team Ards, where George Senior was player-manager. Later on, the pair came together again, this time in the record books, as the first father and son duo to represent England, a feat since repeated by only a handful of families.

George Junior had travelled to Chile as an unused member of the 1962 World Cup squad and the following year he won his first cap, against Brazil. In the years that followed, he would surely have claimed the inside-left berth more often had the great Johnny Haynes not stood in his way. Even so, by the time 1966 came around, Eastham was an established part of the scene, narrowly missing out on a starting place.

A pity. The gentler, more sophisticated rhythms of international football often suited better than the coarse cut and thrust of domestic dust-ups. At 5ft 7ins, this slightly built player was vulnerable to being elbowed aside during physical battles, as described by David Court, a young team-mate at Arsenal.

"He was revered at Highbury, but he wasn't the biggest," said Court. "When you played someone like Leeds, they'd target him straight away and try to kick him out of the game. You could get away with that in those days. Now he'd be even better because you wouldn't be able to get near him. He had a great first touch, a good left foot and was a very astute passer of the ball who used to go past people."

Eastham's Arsenal career was slow to take off despite him scoring two goals on his debut against Bolton in December 1960. Only eight months in, Eastham found himself in another dispute, having turned down the modest £30 a week being offered to every first-team player. Along with Mel Charles, Eastham reasoned that as an experienced performer he should be getting paid more than, say, a young rookie who had just broken through. On this subject, the Arsenal chairman, Sir Bracewell Smith, was adamant: "A team of 11 is a team of 11," he explained. "And that's the way they'll be treated." Eastham faced a dilemma. Did he stand his ground and risk the old "troublemaker" tag resurfacing again or did he bite his tongue for the sake of team harmony? Remembering his father's advice, Eastham held out and as a result was made available for transfer. Fortunately, a compromise was eventually reached. The business of playing could now be addressed.

Again, complications lay ahead. When George Swindin was replaced as manager by Billy Wright, a change in formation left Eastham on the sidelines. For the second time in his short Highbury career, he was reluctantly placed on the transfer list. A fractious period followed before player and manager resolved their differences. Once reinstated, Eastham went on to captain the Club during a period that certainly cannot be described as "golden". It did serve, though, as a vital transitional stage for several youth team players – the likes of John Radford, Bob Wilson, Peter Storey, Peter Simpson and Geordie Armstrong – to graduate to the first team and in due course go on to form the core of the 1970/1971 Double-winning side.

In August 1966, Eastham moved to Stoke City, and later to coach in South Africa. Several thousand miles and a host of great memories now separated the trailblazer from his famous dispute – a courageous stance modestly dismissed shortly after the court case. "If I had not made a case, another player would have come along to do so," he said. "A change in players' conditions was as inevitable as the sunset." Maybe so. But it took someone like Eastham – a stubborn, principled, unbending character – to put himself in the firing line to make the vital breakthrough.

Just as with Bosman, every modern-day player should acknowledge the debt they owe George Eastham.

**Alan Smith**

## PROFILE

# **An accidental Englishman**

Joe Baker, a lightning quick striker who was the Michael Owen of his day, was a Scot who played for England, just missing out to Geoff Hurst for the 1966 World Cup finals

Imagine being one of the most electrifyingly gifted players of your generation and one of the most good-hearted, agreeable personalities in the game, yet being despised by your own countrymen. That was the dilemma, you could say the agony, of Joe Baker, one of the quickest centre-forwards ever seen over 10 yards. Baker was the first Scottish League player to be selected by England and when he first appeared for England, against Northern Ireland in 1959 on account of his dazzling goal-scoring feats for Hibernian, there were English newspaper headlines, notably in the *Daily Express*, which howled: "What is this Scot doing in our side?" Having scored in his debut at Wembley against Danny Blanchflower and company, he was included in the team to face the nation where his soul belonged, Scotland at Hampden Park. As he stood there dutifully singing "God Save the Queen" in his white shirt, 129,000 Scotsmen hurled abuse at him. It was an experience that would have destroyed a lesser man.

"People were screaming 'Traitor!' and 'Get back to England'. It was a nightmare," Baker would recall. "I was hauled down in the penalty box in that game, and Bobby Charlton scored from the spot to give us a 1-1 draw. I was relieved. If either team had won I would have needed to go into hiding for a few days. At the time I was still living in a council house with my mother." His arrival at the England camp for his first game had been a drama in itself. Flying to Heathrow from Edinburgh, he jumped into a cab and, in his broad Lanarkshire accent, told the driver to take him to a hotel in Hendon, North London. The Cockney driver said he knew the hotel well and remarked that it was where the England team was staying. Baker replied: "Well I hope so, I'm playing for them on Wednesday."

A few miles down the road they were waved over by a police car. The cabbie, believing he had some Scottish nutter in the back, had called up the law to deal with the matter. A bobby stuck his head through the window and said: "What's all this about you playing for England?" Baker reaffirmed the facts, showing the policeman the back page of a newspaper. The policeman peered down to look at the photograph, the name Baker meaning nothing to him. "Bloody hell, are we really that bad?!" he exclaimed. It was a story on which Joe Baker would dine out for the rest of his professional career – and beyond. For the tens of thousands of doubters, he quickly justified himself with a spectacular

goal. "An absolute beauty, and after all the controversy I thought to myself 'thank you very much'," he said.

Baker was a sensation in every sense. In four seasons with Hibs, 1957-1961, having emerged at the age of 17, he scored 159 goals, including 29 from 45 games in his opening season. His Scottish League season's record of 42 goals in 1959/1960 stands to this day. Denis Law, the legendary compatriot with whom he was to share a torrid experience with Torino in the Italian League, was one of his highest admirers. "It was his pace that singled him out: there was simply no one who was faster," Law said. "He was good with both feet and strong in the air but it was his speed which counted." Lawrie Reilly, the famed Hibs striker whom Baker succeeded, concurred: "He was lightning-quick, the Michael Owen of his day and a lovely man with whom I spent many happy hours on the golf course."

On account of his move to Turin in 1961, there was a four-year gap in Baker's appearances for England. Nowadays it is largely forgotten that, alongside the inimitable Jimmy Greaves, he was the likely leader of England's attack for the 1966 World Cup until, late in the preparations, Alf Ramsey decided in favour of Geoff Hurst. In December 1965, employing a 4-3-3 formation for the first time, England overwhelmed Spain in Madrid. For the first time Bobby Charlton was given a free, central midfield role. Baker's display was exhilarating; here was one of the moments that made discerning viewers believe that England were capable of winning the trophy. By one of those twists of fate, Baker was unluckily included in a home friendly against Poland the night before the draw for the finals was made in January. Incessant rain had turned Goodison Park into a bog and England struggled on a night when Bobby Moore scored his only goal for England in a 1-1 draw. By one of those twists of fortune, it was to be the last England game for the erudite Scotsman. "I thought we would have a great chance of winning in 1966 because we were playing all our games at Wembley," Baker recalled. "Conditions were very difficult against Poland in that last game. I received no letter or phone call to explain why, and that hurt a lot."

The paradox of his international miscasting arose on account of FIFA's qualification then being by country of birth rather than parental nationality. The son of a sailor, Baker was born in Liverpool, his mother almost immediately returning to live in Motherwell due to the incessant bombing of Merseyside in 1940. Suffering from tuberculosis when young, Baker had little interest in football until encouraged by his elder brother Gerry, later himself also a professional, with St Mirren. Leaving school at 15, Baker began an engineering apprenticeship while signing for Hibs, suddenly finding himself thrust into the first team because of injuries. His success was instantaneous. Having been selected to play for Scotland schoolboys, he had no idea that he would be



obliged to play for England, the first Scot to do so. A stunning performance in a club friendly against Wolves persuaded Billy Wright, England's captain, to recommend him to Walter Winterbottom, the England manager, and the rest, as they say, is history.

This was an era when a stream of glorious players were still flowing into the front rank of the Scottish game. There was a memorable confrontation between Hibs and Barcelona in the Fairs Cup [later UEFA Cup], in which Baker outshone such famous opponents as the Spaniard Luis Suarez and Sándor Kocsis, émigré from the most famous of all Hungarian national teams. His clockwork goalscoring was ensuring Baker the transfer attention of many envious clubs, his departure hastened when – if anyone in today's financial environment could believe it – he asked for a £5 pay rise. The club pathetically countermanded, under a newspaper headline: "We can't afford Baker's demands." The truth was they fancied the transfer fee. Soon Baker was heading for the traumas of an Italian game expedient in its interpretation of the laws.

"It was quite a culture shock," Baker said. "The football was terrible – they would rather kill you than let you get past. When the ball was miles away, opponents would spit on you and elbow you in the face. Denis [Law] had joined me and we used to glance at each other on the field thinking 'what on earth have we landed ourselves in?' I got sent off in my first game. The rival centre-half just came up to me and stuck two fingers in my eyes, so I lashed out. Nevertheless, Denis got one goal and I'd scored another two. The flat we stayed in was the height of luxury, big electronic gates, with a garage in the basement and a lift from there up to the living room. Being used to a council house, it wasn't quite my style. Nor were the new wages of £100 a week. Not that I ever collected them, I was fined so often I don't think I ever reached the full total. They fined you if you missed a chance." Buying himself a flash Alfa Romeo, one quiet evening Baker and Law went for a spin, more literally than they would have wished, skidding into a monument. Law was unhurt but Baker suffered multiple injuries including a double fractured jaw. His life was saved only by the presence in Turin at that moment of a conference of ear, nose and throat specialists, whose surgical attention was crucial to his survival, notwithstanding that he was in a coma for two weeks.

Neither Scot could wait to return to the British game. Within months, Baker made a remarkable recovery and was soon signed by Arsenal for around the same sum, £70,000, as had been paid by Torino. With George Eastham, that delicate midfield creator, he was to form a partnership which in other circumstances might have helped bring trophies back to Highbury. Sadly, all was not at ease in the dressing room under the management of Billy Wright. In his

first season, Baker scored 31 goals, and his record overall was 93 in 144 League games. "I spent four highly enjoyable seasons with Arsenal and managed to score regularly. We had a really good squad of players. Yet I spent 17 years in senior football and won absolutely nothing. I've often wondered why that was. I think the answer is that every club I went to was in some sort of trouble. They were looking for me to get them out of a spot of bother, and I think mostly I did that. Maybe I should have stayed in one place longer than I did, but moving clubs gave me fresh challenges and kept me interested."

For all Baker's brilliance, Arsenal's occasional promise during his four years remained unfulfilled. Again and again the combination of Eastham's intelligence and Baker's pace and finishing power would enthral the crowd, but the team were seldom a complete unit, and lived on the permanent edge of frustration. In 1966, Baker moved to Nottingham Forest, again to be tormented by near success: second in the League, semi-finalists in the FA Cup. There he was joined by the equally talented but wayward Jim Baxter. Baxter was in effect signed by the chairman, apparently against the wishes of manager Johnny Carey. Baker went from Forest to Sunderland for a couple of years, then back to Hibs in 1971. A truly great player wound down back in his true homeland, no doubt wondering until his death in 2003, following heart problems, whether his eight international caps might not have been six times as many or more had he been permitted to represent the land where lay his natural affection.

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **The Wright attitude**

**Billy Wright, a defensive rock for England who won 105 caps, had a taxing time managing Arsenal from 1962-1966, but his sportsmanship and integrity won him many friends**

Although Billy Wright's dismissal from Highbury was a sad denouement for this national figurehead of the game, and though he was swiftly re-employed by TV company ATV in the Midlands, it was always evident to those who knew him well that he was miscast as a manager. He was no more suited to the job than Bobby Moore, that other cult figure of an England captain, would be years later; each of them men of dignity, presence, sportsmanship, integrity, with a genuine regard for fellow beings. Though he married late, Billy was a reverential father figure, adoring his children and the most dutiful of husbands, even to a degree overshadowed socially by his overtly showbiz wife. In his time, he may have dislodged one or two kneecaps with his studs, yet he was anything but a dirty player. It was apparent that, even in front of nondescript crowds at occasionally minor venues, he had the proverbial heart of gold, giving everything on the day to the occasion. He won his three League titles with Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1954, 1958 and 1959, and an FA Cup victory in 1949 in an 18-year professional career that began in 1941, punctuated by wartime guest appearances with Leicester City. As a player he was never less than a supreme role model, never being booked or sent off, which is an extraordinary accolade for a half-back as tenacious as he was. He made over 500 peacetime appearances for Wolves and captained England 90 times (a record he still holds jointly with Bobby Moore) in 105 caps, playing in three World Cup Finals tournaments in 1950, 1954 and 1958.

He appeared initially for England at righthalf, in the opening post-war match away to Northern Ireland, a 7-2 victory. He remained at wing-half for England for eight seasons, finally converting to centre-half for the last two matches of the World Cup in Switzerland in 1954, a 2-0 victory over the host nation and the 4-2 humbling by Uruguay in the quarter-final. For the next five seasons he was there as the rock of defence, always allowing for the two disasters against Hungary, 6-3 and 7-1 at Wembley and Budapest respectively in 1953/1954. It would be difficult to say in which position he was the more accomplished. As right-half, he was an exact passer without being imaginative. As a centrehalf, he climbed astonishingly higher in the air than his 5ft 9ins would suggest he was capable. In both positions he was a model of proficiency, yet short of the genius of, say, John Charles. On the occasion of his 100th cap, a one-goal victory courtesy of

young Bobby Charlton, at Wembley in 1958, that doyen of football correspondents Brian Glanville wrote: "He is exceptional less for what he does than how he does it: the incarnation, in a shabby age and a cynical profession, of the schoolboy hero. Everything fits: the bright blond hair, the pleasant, open face, the dedication to club and country, the unfailing good humour off the field. He is a Godsend to the game's apologists: the ideal brand image for professional football, a smiling reassurance that all must be well after all, whatever the tales of iniquitous contracts and illegal payments. From this point of view, his 100th cap represented a moral accolade, bestowed on a perfect school captain by a delighted headmaster."

Terry Neill echoed some of these sentiments in his autobiography *Revelations of a Football Manager*: "By the time my first contract came to an end, Billy Wright had taken over as manager, and I hadn't always been a regular. Whenever a new player was signed, I was often the person to be left out. Each time I fought my way back ... Billy had made me Club captain at the age of 20 the year before, and though I was honoured to be given the job, I knew I was too young and inexperienced. With senior players like Joe Baker, George Eastham and Geoff Strong around, I did not find it easy, but I retained the job until Frank McLintock took over in the late Sixties. I would never have wanted to play for another club. I loved Arsenal, the traditions, the famous old building, and the reputation that the Club enjoyed worldwide. When I went on trips with Northern Ireland, fans in foreign countries would ignore the famous, more experienced players in the side and make straight for me because I was wearing an Arsenal blazer."

In spite of Bob Wilson's difficult early years at Highbury, achieving the integration from being a schoolteaching amateur into becoming a genuine full-time professional, he retains a longstanding affection for Wright the manager. Being in and out of the team in his early years – indeed, more out than in – Wilson could dispassionately view the wavering fortunes during Wright's years. "I think he was scared of not playing those he had bought, like Ian Ure," Wilson reflects. "He tended not to trust the youngsters, Radford, Kelly, Kennedy, Sammels. He wasn't a strong character but he could be nasty at times with those he had power over. For instance, at times in training, he would put me up against Joe Baker in sprints, when I was a bit of a sluggard. The lovely side of Bill was his pride in the Club, his pride in being manager of this national institution, and the transparency of his ambitions to make the Club great once more."

It was a formidable challenge that Denis Hill-Wood had offered him and the sadness of the admission of failure was that here were two of the most honest and sincere men in a game not always whiter-than-white. For all Wright's lack of

experience, there is no way of asserting that Shankly, say, or Matt Busby would have succeeded with the same material where Wright had failed. Wright produced many of the necessary ingredients at Highbury, except those often elusive qualities of rhythm, and discipline, on and off the pitch. When he arrived, Arsenal were already at a low ebb. What he had to live up to, or rather recapture and even surpass, were the glories of the Thirties. A myth-like aura still surrounded the Club, a sense that Arsenal should be great as of right.

Few in the game envied Wright, many feared for his prospects. He was given a free hand, allowed to pick his own assistant and to buy those he fancied, finances permitting. The irony was that at the moment of his dismissal the Club's second, third and fourth teams had finished second, fourth and first in their respective competitions, alongside the success of the Youth XI. There were successful men on the board. Besides Hill-Wood and his son Peter, a banker, there were Sir Robert Bellinger, self-made chainstore millionaire and the Lord Mayor-elect of London; Stuart McIntyre, of Pearl Assurance; and Guy Bracewell Smith, son of the former chairman. They could have interfered, but never did. Certainly Wright did not have the breaks which any manager needs, but it could not be ignored that he had bought good players and remained short of having a good team.

Whatever the dismal conclusion to his football career, there was a reverence among fellow players that would remain until his death. Bill Slater, OBE, remembered being conscious of the fact that he was following a legend when he succeeded Wright as captain of Wolves, where the mantra in the dressing room was 'Show the Wright Spirit'. Alf Ramsey observed: "What has most impressed me about Billy is his attitude, going through life always trying to do the correct thing whether it is as a player or as a person. You'll never hear anyone in the game say a bad word about him." Stanley Matthews, interviewed by Norman Giller for his biography *A Hero for all Seasons*, at the time of Wright's death in 1994, said: "Billy played the game with his soul. He gave everything he had every time he went on the pitch." Don Howe reflected: "I grew up in Wolverhampton, and Billy was my hero. When I was first picked for England, I was nervous on my arrival at the team hotel about joining legends like Tom Finney in the dining room. Billy saw me hovering outside, came and led me in, and introduced me as if I was his brother ... Arsenal should have been more patient with him. Let's face it, the team that Bertie Mee and I guided to the Double was largely the one that Billy had built. I will not have it that he was a bad manager. He was an unlucky one."

Ron Atkinson recalled: "I used to clean his boots when I was a kid and he always went out of his way to thank me, when most pros would have taken it for

granted ... I've met a lot of so-called superstars in my life, but never one to touch Billy for humility and generosity."

**David Miller**



12.

# **The innovator**

Herbert Chapman had already tasted success as a manager when he came to Arsenal, and he brought glory to the Club with his revolutionary thinking

# Chapman: the early years

The emergence of Herbert Chapman in the 1920s and 1930s as one of the foremost English football managers of all time was dependent upon three coincidental factors. In the first place, that he moved into management almost as an afterthought with Northampton Town in 1907; secondly, that he subsequently survived the financial scandal that engulfed Leeds City during his period there from 1912-1919; and thirdly that Arsenal came to be promoted immediately after the War in 1919, from the Second to First Division, through a series of obscure, clandestine and not to say improper negotiations by the Club's chairman Sir Henry Norris.

At the end of World War I, during which most professional footballers had served and many died, and the finances of most clubs had predictably slumped, Arsenal's position was precarious. At the outbreak of war, Arsenal were set to make a return to the First Division, which would have offset a standing debt of £60,000 and the huge investment by Norris, in excess of £120,000. Five years later, the players were older and out of form. With what was doubtless a degree of panic, Norris embarked upon a subterfuge that is without parallel in the English game. With an insouciance that would make even a politician blush, he sought to talk Arsenal into the First Division, contrary to all regulations and protocol.

At the end of the concluding pre-war League table, 1914/1915, Arsenal had finished fifth in the Second Division. Above them were Derby County, Preston North End, Barnsley and Wolverhampton Wanderers. In 1919, the League management committee decided to increase the First Division from 20 to 22 clubs. The normal process to effect this change would be that the two bottom clubs of the First Division from 1914/1915, in this instance Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur, would retain their status and the top two from the Second Division would be promoted. During the several months between Armistice and the reestablishment of the League programme, Norris moved stealthily among friends and well-placed connections to bring about his conjuror's trick, something way beyond having obtained Fulham FC entry to the League and moving Woolwich Arsenal from Plumstead to North London in 1913.

Having been knighted in 1917 and become a Tory MP a year later, Norris was well placed to exert influence. His underhand tactics were, to a degree, aided in that there had been allegations elsewhere of irregular payments and matchfixing, in one instance involving Manchester United's final victory over Liverpool in 1915, which enabled them to finish one place above Chelsea.

At the League's AGM of 1919 – presumably with the consent of John McKenna, the president – it was agreed without vote that Chelsea's case should be considered separately from Spurs, and the retention of their First Division status was unanimously approved.

At the same time, the promotion of Derby and Preston, the top two from the Second Division, was given the nod. However, to the astonishment of almost everyone, McKenna then proposed that Arsenal should be given the remaining place, in preference to Spurs, whose right it was, or even Barnsley or Wolves, who had finished ahead of Arsenal. McKenna's case seems to have been that "the prestige" of Arsenal justified their inclusion, notwithstanding that Wolves were an older club. Put to the vote, the result was: Arsenal 18, Spurs eight, Barnsley five, Wolves four, Nottingham Forest (19th in the Second Division) three, Birmingham two, Hull one.

Charles Roberts, chairman of Spurs, was dumbfounded. This extraordinary action was without any possible explanation. From where could Arsenal's 18 votes possibly have come? There never was any explanation for, let alone inquiry into, the affair.

Simultaneously in 1919, inquiries began into allegations that Leeds City, among others, had breached wartime regulations by paying players more than the agreed reduced rates. A joint commission of the Football Association and Football League asked for the club's accounts, but the request was refused. Chapman, together with five other members of the club's administration, was banned from involvement in football management. His football career appeared over.

However, he was, at the time, no longer Leeds City's secretary-manager; a year earlier he had begun exploiting his background in engineering to work at an arms factory, and then entered full-time industrial management at a food manufacturers. Denied access to the club's accounts, the League expelled City. The club's fixtures were taken over by Port Vale, the players auctioned off. Details of the alleged excess payments were never revealed, and shortly after City's expulsion they were replaced by the election of Leeds United, recently formed, to the Second Division in 1920. Chapman continued with his industrial work, carrying with him the stigma of his suspension.

Chapman was born on January 19, 1878 – eight years prior to the formation

of Arsenal – at Kiveton Park, a small mining town halfway between Sheffield and Worksop. He was one of the seven children (six of them boys) of an illiterate miner and was a bright child who benefited from the Education Act of 1870, which made school attendance compulsory. After attending the local school he went on to Sheffield Technical College, where he studied mining engineering. Moderately adept at sport, he had become captain and secretary of his school football team – early evidence of his proclivity for organisation.

Football in the 1880s and 1890s was rapidly moving from its early amateur days, dominated by the public schools and Oxbridge, to the professionalism of, especially, the north-east and Lancashire. Professionalism had been legalised in 1885, resistant forces creating the FA Amateur Cup eight years later. Chapman, believing firmly in the ethics of the amateur game, would reflect later that he did not consider anyone would choose to be a professional but for the matter of earning a living.

By the late 1890s, having appeared for various clubs in Sheffield as an inside-forward of average ability, he crossed the Pennines, aged 19, to join Stalybridge Rovers. From there he moved, still as an amateur, to Grimsby Town, becoming increasingly aware of the ineffective ad hoc management of teams. Chapman, who continued his engineering studies in the evenings, was, according to the *Grimsby Gazette*, a small but sturdy player. There came a further move by this itinerant jobseeker to Swindon, and then to Sheppey in Kent. His character was evident, once continuing for Sheppey United when badly injured. From there he returned to Sheffield to intensify his mining interests, signing for Worksop Town in the Midland League. He was overshadowed by Harry, the best footballer among his brothers, who enjoyed a prominent goal-scoring career with Sheffield Wednesday, the League champions in 1903 and 1904.

It was in 1901 that Chapman decided, because well-paid jobs were difficult to find, to assist his finances by turning professional. He did so with Northampton Town, formed in 1897 and by now elected to the Southern League. He distinguished himself by scoring twice in a League match against Spurs, who were then the Cup holders. Cup fever reached Northampton in 1902 when, having survived the qualifying rounds, they were drawn at home against Sheffield United. Such was his display that at the end of the season he was approached by United, agreeing to join them on condition he could revert to his amateur status, as he had now gained a diploma with the Institute of Mining Engineers.

Chapman had, however, over-reached his playing skills; his star declined, and in 1903 he signed professionally with Notts County. They too discarded him at the end of one season and he returned to Northampton, moving to Spurs, in

the Southern League, in 1905.

In the autumn, he married Annie Poxon, a teacher, whom he had met in Kiveton Park. By 1907, Chapman's playing form had further slumped and he agreed to accept an emergency call from former contacts at Northampton, where the club had fallen to the foot of the Southern League First Division. Walter Bull, a Spurs colleague who was about to join Northampton as manager at the end of his playing career, suddenly decided against taking the post. He suggested Chapman should take his place, and, in April, Chapman was appointed player-manager. Bidding him a fond farewell, the *Tottenham Herald* said: "Although we can hardly say that he is in the first flight of footballers, he is the most conscientious of players and a gentleman both on and off the field."

Because of his extended involvement in the game, Chapman's mining career took a back seat. Such was his organisational touch that within two seasons Northampton moved from the relegation zone to become Southern League champions, with a record 55 points and 90 goals. He played his last professional game early in 1909. What distinguished a now thriving club was his tactical vision – a novel quality in a game still largely being played by instinct and improvisation. Also evident in Northampton's play was their sportsmanship; his maxim was never to do anything to an opponent on the field "that will later prevent your meeting him in the street or in church and shaking his hand".

Only in his early thirties, Chapman's football intellect was already stretching beyond his immediate job. With newly created southern clubs challenging the northern dominance, he proposed a reorganisation not only in the Southern League but of the entire professional structure – with the creation of a pyramid system of promotion and relegation. He was ignored, but his proposal was similar to that which eventually would be introduced later that century.

At Northampton he was rooted in a principle, widely misinterpreted, that every team started a game with one point before kick-off. This brought criticism that he was negative, but in fact his objective was that, fundamentally, teams should be attack-oriented. A notable FA Cup tie in the fourth round in 1911, away to Newcastle United, brought publicity for the club and its manager. Newcastle were the glamour team at the time, but in a turbulent first encounter in front of a crowd of 42,000, Northampton claimed a draw and came close to winning when striking the bar near the end. They waived ground rights for the replay in return for £900 compensation, only to lose to a controversial penalty.

Chapman's increased prominence led to him being offered, and accepting, the secretary-manager post with Leeds City the following year, at an increased salary, with the objective of taking City into the First Division. In his first season, they finished sixth, with a tally of 70 goals breaking the club's record.

However, there was an ominous undercurrent, with an investigation by the Football League into alleged excessive payments within terms offered by Chapman when signing new players. The club was fined and Chapman censured. In the 1913/ 1914 season, City narrowly missed promotion.

With the outbreak of war at the beginning of the following season, there were disputes at all levels – among League officials, clubs and players, and in newspaper articles – about the extent to which the game should continue. A cut in wages was introduced, and performances declined in common with attendances, some of which dropped by half. Chapman's innovative management, his introduction of tactical team talks both before and after matches, was seriously undermined. Some City players also refused to accept the pay cuts.

Towards the end of the 1914/1915 season, the FA ruled that no wage was to be paid during the closed season and the maximum wage was reduced from £4 to £3. Leeds finished a lowly 15th, with the club's financial control having been placed in the hands of the receiver. The club's continuing existence was facilitated by local well-wishers forming a syndicate that created a limited liability company. City were now in the northern division of the Midland League, playing an adjusted professional programme, taking the title in this convenient arrangement ahead of Huddersfield. In 1916, Chapman became manager of a munitions factory outside Leeds. City retained the title the following season.

Managing Arsenal from 1908-1915 had been George Morrell, a Glaswegian, who arrived from the same post at Greenock Morton. He had been obliged to sell a number of players to balance Arsenal's books, and was involved in the important move from Plumstead to Highbury, but was obliged to resign during reduced wartime operations.

In 1919, Norris appointed Leslie Knighton, who had been born in 1884 at Burton-on-Trent. His playing career had been cut short by injury and he had moved on to be assistant secretary-manager with Huddersfield then Manchester City. But his control of playing affairs was limited by Norris's constant intervention (he placed a cap of £1,000 on transfer fees, and refused to allow Knighton to sign anyone shorter than 5ft 8ins). Knighton's squad contained an intelligent, though unexceptional, wing-half, Tom Whittaker, but whatever ideas and plans Knighton may have had, the circumstances under which he was obliged by his chairman to run the team left him tactically crippled.

Adding to his frustration, and Norris's embarrassment, was the comparative success of neighbouring Spurs. Bouncing back from the insult of being passed over for promotion in 1919, Spurs deservedly got it as Division Two champions

in 1919/1920. Between 1921 and 1925 they enjoyed a degree of success that left Arsenal in the shade. Arsenal struggled, finishing 19th in 1923/1924 and 20th the following season. Knighton's position was doomed, even though Norris maintained he had persuaded him to stay for another year with the promise of a benefit from Arsenal's match against Spurs that would have run into thousands of pounds.

In Knighton's opinion, Norris sacked him to avoid making any such payment. An advertisement appeared in *Athletic News* on May 11, 1925: "Arsenal Football Club is open to receive applications for the position of team manager. He must be experienced and possess the highest qualifications for the post, both as to ability and personal character. The gentleman whose sole ability to build a good side depends on the payment of exorbitant transfer fees need not apply."

Chapman did. In 1920, his munitions company had been disbanded, leaving him unemployed and banned from football. But in 1921, he had been approached by Huddersfield Town. The Football League, accepting the evidence that Chapman had been absent from Leeds City at the time of the alleged illegal wartime payments and hence ignorant of them, withdrew his suspension. His impact at Huddersfield was immediate. In his first season, the team, founded as recently as 1908, won the FA Cup, defeating Preston by the only goal in a bad-tempered match. It was the first time the Cup had been won with a penalty. Nonetheless, a 29,000 crowd cheered Chapman on to the Leeds Road pitch for the final League match two days later. His first move on arrival had been to find a playmaker and the man he signed was Clem Stephenson, 33, an inside-forward with Aston Villa, who had formerly been with him at Leeds City during the war, for £4,000. Stephenson revolutionised Huddersfield's performances and attendances leapt above 20,000. In the next two seasons, they won the League title and, upon Chapman's departure, continued for an historic first hat-trick in 1925/1926.

Chapman's achievement had been the more remarkable when considered against the background of post-war economic depression and widespread unemployment. The hardheaded League management even refused to allow admission concessions to the unemployed, but an advantage in Huddersfield's rise had been the relegation of neighbouring Bradford City, leaving them as the only First Division club in the West Riding. By winning the League in 1924, they became the first club since the war to win the Cup and League, and the first to secure the League Championship on goal average, crucially beating Nottingham Forest in their final match.

Chapman had emphasised his attitude to dirty play by immediately



transferring the first of his players to be sent off. The widespread acknowledgement of his almost scientific training methods had undoubtedly reached the attention of Norris, and the two men had met already through the game.

As the *Sporting Chronicle* noted: "Do clubs realise to the full today the importance of the man who is placed in control? They are ready to pay up to £5,000 for the services of a player. Do they attach as much importance to the official who will have charge of the player, who has advised them concerning the choice of this costly talent ... The man behind the scenes who finds them, trains them and gets the best out of them is the most important man in the game from the club's point of view."

For accepting Arsenal's invitation, Chapman was to be paid £2,000 annually, by far the highest salary at that time.

**David Miller**

# From challengers to champions

There were many aspects of a move from Huddersfield to Highbury which appealed to Herbert Chapman. It was a challenge to both his character and his ambition. Though by now he was already famous on account of deeds in south-west Yorkshire, he saw in Arsenal the scope for turning a big club in London into a truly great club. He knew that his work up to now had not fully extended him. Such was his insight into the future of the professional game, and the potential of Arsenal to lead the way, that his reply to the Club's advertisement amounted to a statement of faith in himself. He might be quietly spoken, of average height, inconspicuous in a crowd, yet here was a fighter, a manager devoting almost every waking hour – in a manner unprecedented at the time – to the simultaneous development of players and club. He understood the challenge ahead and he predicted that it would be five years before Arsenal would win a major honour.

When Chapman arrived in 1925, the Gunners were still finding being in the First Division a hard task. His instincts, however, were sound. A key aspect of his vision was the proximity of Highbury to the Gillespie Road underground station, a factor he had earlier noted and saw as an essential part of being able to bring in the crowds to watch the team he intended to build. He would immediately brush aside Norris's self-imposed maximum limit on transfer fees of £1,500, never mind that the job advertisement had stipulated applicants should not expect lavish spending. He would pay a new record fee for David Jack, spending nearly £20,000 on him and Alex James, a sum that exceeded the total outlay over 10 years for many clubs. Ideas flowed from him like carrier pigeons from their cage. He advocated floodlit football 30 years before it became commonplace and, most provocative of all in the light of controversies of the early 21st century, the institution of goal judges to rule whether the ball had crossed the line. He recommended numbered jerseys, initially rejected by the authorities; white balls on muddy pitches or in poor visibility; rubber studs for frozen grounds; and an adjustment of the relegation and promotion system to embrace competitions beyond the Football League, so as to create a pyramid structure which became reality in the late 20th century.

Over 30 years before Alf Ramsey became England's first professional national team manager, Chapman advocated proper squad preparation. He installed a players' savings scheme, with the club acting as their bankers, should the players so wish, providing too the possibility of granting loans. The players would donate a pound or two from their wages to earn six per cent interest in the Club scheme. This policy ended at Highbury only when the maximum wage was abolished in 1961. The scheme was a reflection of Chapman's manmanagement skills in industry during the war; he was sensitive to a working man's employment conditions. This attention to detail was applied equally to the administration of the Club. The new manager personally examined every item of every account, down to the last pence, even querying his bill for a cup of tea and a bun when travelling. Yet in payments to his players, he was generous. For sure, he was single-minded, but not to the exclusion of his own family affairs. He was an assistant churchwarden at St Mary's at Hendon, to where he had moved his family of two sons and two daughters. Asked once what was his proudest moment, he replied, notwithstanding Arsenal's many triumphs: "My son's qualification as a solicitor."

It was certainly a new regime that now hit Highbury. Chapman was the first club manager to plan methodically the winning of matches. Decades prior to tactical organisation becoming fundamental to a team's play, his principle was that the intentions and actions of his own side were paramount, irrespective of what the opposition were doing. The 1920s, by comparison, were still an era when most managers relied upon optimism, luck and the success or failure of individual players.

In his pursuit of planning and consistency, Chapman introduced team talks at midday on a Friday, and on a Monday to analyse the previous Saturday's result. He used a magnetic table marked out as a field with mini-players that could be moved. Chapman instilled the maxim that, more than 30 years later, Malcolm Allison impressed upon a teenage Bobby Moore at West Ham: "At any moment in a match, always know what you will do next if you get the ball." He was just as firm in his discipline of the Club's administrative staff. No one could leave in the evening until he had telephoned Chapman's office at 6pm to ask if it was in order to do so.

An essential ingredient of Chapman's Highbury revolution was Tom Whittaker, not in his capacity as a moderate-to-good midfield player and occasional full-back, but as a self-taught physiotherapist/masseur/trainer. Whittaker's career developed by a combination of accident and necessity. Taking part in an FA tour of Australia at the end of the 1924/1925 season, Whittaker seriously damaged his knee at Wollongong, an industrial town 50 miles from

Sydney. Hobbling about, he made himself useful in the dressing room where, massaging the legs of some of his colleagues, he discovered a touch that was to make him one of the most respected physios in the game. Despite having his knee repaired by Sir Robert Jones, an orthopaedic specialist in Liverpool who was an innovator of modern surgical treatment of damaged cartilage, Whittaker's playing days were over.

Shortly after hearing the news, Chapman summoned Whittaker to his office, led him out on to the terraces of a deserted grandstand, and said: "I'm going to make this the greatest club ground in the world, and I'm going to make you the greatest trainer in the game. How about it?" Thus Whittaker became second-team trainer, and deputy to George Hardy (with whom he was lodging at the time) with the first team. In support of his promise, Chapman sent Whittaker on a year's part-time course to study anatomy, massage, medical gymnastics and electrical therapy under Sir Robert. There was to be no bucket and sponge regime at Highbury.

Whittaker responded by becoming an expert in his field and when, during a home game in February 1927, Hardy took the liberty of shouting tactical instructions from the touchline, Chapman sent him packing to Tottenham Hotspur and appointed Whittaker as chief trainer. Highbury was about to acquire a reputation for sports medicine that would continue for 80 years, to the point where Bob Wilson, goalkeeper in the Double-winning team of 1971, could say: "Such is the expertise in the Highbury medical room, the on-the-spot analysis of any broken bone, that by the time you reach hospital they already know what they're going to need to do."

For Whittaker's part, he had an uncanny sixth sense about a player's psychological needs in relation to physiological conditions. He would get injured players back to fitness in half the time it would take at any other club. So impressive did his reputation become that leading performers in other sports, such as tennis stars Fred Perry and Bunny Austin, and Test cricketers Gubby Allen and Freddie Brown, came for treatment and advice. "Tom's healing powers were truly phenomenal," Cliff Bastin, teenage hero of the 1930s, would later write. Bernard Gadney, a rugby international, visited Whittaker on crutches, his career seemingly ended. By the following season he was captain of England. Chapman commented that if trainers were transferred like players, Whittaker's fee would exceed them all.

If Chapman's first season, 1925/1926, was to prove relatively successful, finishing second to Huddersfield Town as his former team moved to their third consecutive title – the first club to do so – the prediction that it would take five years truly to make a mark was to prove accurate. The next four seasons were no

better than average, finishing 11th, 10th, ninth and 14th. The priority, initially, was team building, new arrivals including Tom Parker, a bald-headed right-back from Southampton who was to play more than 150 consecutive League games, and Jack Lambert, an inside-forward from Doncaster Rovers. Lambert was a dogged stalwart, reliable but never a star, who became manager of Arsenal's nursery club Margate, when his playing career finished. He became Arsenal 'A' team manager in 1938, but was killed in a road accident in 1940.

The most notable arrival was Charlie Buchan, a renowned goalscorer with Sunderland, who was English-born of Scottish parents. He could have joined Woolwich Arsenal as a teenager had the club not rejected a modest travelling expense claim of 11 shillings. And 15 years earlier, Norris, then chairman of Fulham, had attempted to sign the 18-year-old Buchan, but the player had declined the offer of 30 shillings (£1.50) a week. Sunderland now demanded £4,000. Norris, nervous about signing a 34-year-old, offered a fee of £2,000 plus £100 for every goal Buchan scored in the next 12 months. As for Chapman, he had first met Buchan when playing a wartime game for Leeds City. When Chapman arrived at Buchan's sports shop in Sunderland to ask him to join Arsenal, Buchan was stunned that his club were prepared to release him, and asked to be allowed to make up his mind overnight.

After losing only one of their first eight games (though, distressingly, it was at home to Spurs), Chapman's new team slumped to a seven-goal defeat at Newcastle United, their defence run ragged by Hughie Gallacher, the Scottish maestro, and the shooting of Stan Seymour, the future club chairman. Coincidentally, two months prior to the start of the season, the International Board, governors of the laws of the game, had introduced a new offside rule. This required there to be only two defenders (usually the goalkeeper and one other defender) between a forward and the goal, instead of three. From this change an offside trap became so commonplace that many games were rendered boring while defensive frailty led to bigger scores, such as at Newcastle. As Arsenal made to return south, Buchan, deeply disturbed by the result, asked Chapman if he might return to play for Sunderland, sensing that he had no future at Highbury. Chapman rejected the suggestion outright but at the Monday postmortem, he made an adjustment to Arsenal's tactics that was to change the future of the Club and, it could be argued, the future of the game.

The change was the introduction of the so-called third-back game. A widely accepted legend is that the idea was Chapman's, but the proposal came from Buchan, who suggested that the centre-half should retreat to a position behind the full-back, defending the side of the field where the ball was, while the other full-back likewise retreated, so as to cover the centre-half. Thus for the three

rear-most defenders, the two full-backs would pivot either side of the centrehalf, depending on the attacking path.

To compensate for this withdrawal of the centre-half – the player who throughout the early part of the 20th century had for many teams been an attacking mainspring – Buchan realised it would also be necessary to produce a new playmaker from among the four wing-halves/ inside-forwards. This was a role he fancied for himself. Having bought Buchan to score goals, Chapman resisted, instead nominating Andy Neil for the game that same evening, away to West Ham United. Arsenal proceeded to win 4-0, Buchan scoring twice.

As the season progressed, the adjustment steadily improved. To Norris's relief, profits from gate receipts rose to more than £6,000, a Club record. Different players were used for the roving role and, as stated, Arsenal finished second. With Jack Butler designated as the withdrawn centrehalf, what had been created, in effect, was a 3-3-4 formation, with two wingers and two central strikers up front. This was a forerunner of the formation that would be employed by Hungary and Spurs in the 1950s and 1960s.

By February 1926, a further key figure had arrived, Joe Hulme from Blackburn Rovers, who had a reputation as the fastest winger in Britain. The season's goal-tally would rise to 87, from the previous season's 46, while those conceded went up by only five, to 63.

The relative success of Chapman's first season led to a degree of over-confidence in 1926/1927, and it took him half the season to condition the team's mentality. By then Arsenal were effectively out of the running in the Championship. Part of the problem lay at centre-half where Jack Butler was not adapting sufficiently to playing in the new withdrawn role. In December, Herbie Roberts, a 21-year-old amateur wing-half with Oswestry Town, a gunsmith's apprentice who cost a minimal fee, provided the solution. Rugged and quick, the tall redhead transformed performances at the back, and though less than skilful on the ball, he was to become an essential figure in Arsenal's greatest years yet. Whittaker reflected: "Roberts's ability came from his intelligence and his willingness to abide by instructions. He was told to control the middle, and that's what he did, and his poor distribution was camouflaged by others." His will to win helped restore morale.

After his promotion, Whittaker increasingly controlled the details of Chapman's management backstage. They consulted first thing every morning, unless Chapman was away, on both administration and the form of players. The team re-established its upward trend and for the first time Arsenal reached the FA Cup Final. Inspiration in the early rounds had come from Buchan; witness his two goals, both following free kicks, against Liverpool at Highbury. A place in

the semi-finals had been won by a rare goal from Jack Butler against Wolverhampton Wanderers. Surviving claims for penalties in the semi-final against Southampton, Arsenal reached Wembley with goals from Joe Hulme and Buchan.

The team breached tradition by remaining at Highbury for training during the week before meeting Cardiff City, Chapman believing that familiar surroundings provided the best mental preparation. However, injuries and loss of form undermined their preparations; in the event, the outcome turned on an error by goalkeeper Dan Lewis, himself a Welshman, who had displaced Bill Harper. Seventeen minutes from the end of a less than memorable final, Lewis, going down to gather a shot from Scottish centre-forward Hughie Ferguson, allowed the ball to squeeze under his arm. He may have been partially deceived by the slipperiness of a new ball on his equally new glossy jersey, but in grabbing at it a second time, he merely assisted its slow roll over the line. His skipper, full-back Tom Parker, tried to console him, but the damage was done.

For the first, and only, time the Cup left England for Wales. A distraught Lewis, leaving the field after the presentations, flung his medal to the ground, from where it was belatedly retrieved by his left-half colleague, Bob John, another Welsh international. Arsenal's lingering regret was less over Lewis's error than the fluffed late chance to equalise following a mistake by Tom Farquharson in Cardiff's goal: with Buchan and centre-forward Jimmy Brain each leaving the ball to the other, the opportunity was lost.

Buoyed nonetheless by their narrow failure to lift Arsenal's first major trophy, the team moved into the 1927/1928 season. Any optimism was soon dispelled by retrospective discipline by the FA concerning Sir Henry Norris, the chairman. They had appointed a commission to inquire into allegations of financial inducements above regulation limits to attract players – notably Buchan – to Highbury and also that Norris had additionally diverted club funds to his private account. With regard to Buchan, Norris claimed that he had been responding to pleadings from Chapman, though the point was never proved one way or the other.

The action was a calamity for Norris, who had sunk many thousands of pounds of his own money into the promotion of the club. Unwisely or not, he decided to sue the FA for libel, but in February 1929 the case was rejected by the Lord Chief Justice. Norris and fellow director William Hall were forced to resign and barred from future involvement in the game. Attempting to recover some of his investment, Norris had charged his chauffeur's wages for three years to the Club account, together with other expenses. Buchan claimed, for his part, that he had made no additional money from his transfer, rather that: "I lost rather a lot

through changing quarters like that [from Sunderland to Highbury]".

Norris's successor was Sir Samuel Hill-Wood, whose father had founded Glossop North End, a club built around the family's cotton mill business in Derbyshire. The family name had been Wood but, following a rift with his brother, Sir Samuel had changed his surname by deed poll. He had kept the club going, ill-advisedly, as a source of leisure activity for the mill workers. He was fanatical about all sport and held a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* for having scored 10 runs off a single ball while batting for MCC at Lord's. Whatever his enthusiasm for football, however, Sir Samuel was content to leave the running of the Club largely to the appointed officials, a principle that would be upheld in turn by his son, Denis Hill-Wood, and grandson Peter, the current chairman. It was an ignominious exit for Norris, who in many senses had been the founding father of the club, especially in its move in 1913 from Plumstead to Highbury.

On the playing side, a further strengthening of the defence came with the signing of Eddie Hapgood, a 19-year-old former milkman and left-back for Kettering Town, who had slipped through the fingers of Bristol Rovers in his home town. Hapgood was to become one of the Club's most accomplished figures, both as player and captain, prior to World War II. He was as impeccable in conduct as in technique, a nondrinker and non-smoker addicted to physical fitness. So accurate was Hapgood's distribution that he was a key figure in Arsenal's counterattacking tactics, which could transfer the ball from one penalty area to the other in seconds.

Hapgood's clean image particularly appealed to Chapman, whose first question when interviewing the youngster had been whether he smoked or drank. He had high regard for the dignity of players, wishing to treat them sensitively, as individuals, rather than simply as paid servants of the Club. In return, he expected them to maintain standards of behaviour and dress in keeping with the reputation of Arsenal Football Club. He warned his players about the distractions of nightlife in London's West End during the frenzied jazz era. His disciplinary principles matched his magnanimity. Joe Hulme, for example, requesting a weekend in his native Lancashire following an away match at Bolton was refused, never mind that he had just scored twice in an efficient victory. "What about the three goals you missed?" demanded Chapman, ordering Hulme to train on Monday for a thirdteam match the following Wednesday.

Though 1927/1928 was to be no more than an average League season, finishing in 10th place behind champions Everton, Arsenal again furthered their reputation in the Cup, with four successive home victories against West Bromwich Albion, Everton, Aston Villa and Stoke City. They eventually fell to



Blackburn Rovers in a semi-final at Filbert Street. The attentions of Whittaker, who in March 1928 received his first appointment as trainer to the England side for the match against Scotland at Wembley, were creating unusual levels of fitness. He introduced new training methods such as using horizontal bars with a football tied to them, so that a player could kick the ball at the bar and control it as it rebounded at different angles, and six-a-side head-tennis contests.

The last match of the season was away to Everton, a game which was to be Buchan's farewell appearance before retiring to become a journalist, while William Dean – otherwise known as Dixie – needed three goals to pass the League scoring record of 59, set the previous season by George Camsell of Middlesbrough. Dean achieved the necessary hat-trick, the recordbreaking 60th goal coming five minutes from time, that renowned head glancing the ball in off a post from a corner. Arsenal, however, battled their way to a 3-3 draw, meaning the two teams had shared 18 goals in the three matches.

Although Arsenal had yet to distinguish themselves in the League, modest positions were offset by the relegation of Tottenham Hotspur. Interestingly, they began the 1928/1929 season away to Sheffield Wednesday with numbered shirts, Chelsea doing likewise at home on Chapman's recommendation. Always intent to advance novel concepts for publicity and communication purposes, Chapman considered the move to be advantageous to the public. The ever-myopic Football League forbade any continuation, so Chapman numbered his reserve team shirts. He would not be vindicated nationwide until numbers were introduced in 1939, five years after his death.

The retirement of Buchan left urgent need for a replacement. With the mercurial Hughie Gallacher of Newcastle unavailable, Chapman settled on David Jack, the Bolton Wanderers England international inside-forward. At 29, he was in his prime, an elegant dribbler with a perceptive body swerve and a numbing power of shot. Bolton demanded an exorbitant £13,000 fee, twice the existing record. Bob Wall, then a young assistant secretary at the Club and who was to become its foremost administrator, told an amusing tale, in his autobiography *Arsenal from the Heart*, of being summoned to Chapman's office. "‘Young Wall, come with me today and I'll show you how to conduct a transfer', said Chapman. ‘We're going to sign David Jack. We're meeting Bolton's chairman and manager at the Euston Hotel. Sit with me, listen, and don't say a word'." The pair duly arrived at the lounge bar. Chapman addressed the waiter, placing two pound notes in his hand. "‘George, this is Mr Wall, my assistant. He will drink whisky and dry ginger. I will drink gin and tonic. We should be joined by guests. They will drink whatever they like. See that our guests are given double of everything, but Mr Wall's whisky and ginger will contain no whisky

and my gin and tonic will contain no gin.’

"When Bolton's representatives arrived, drinks flowed freely and they were soon in a contented mood. Chapman opened debate on the fee, which was settled at £10,890. A bargain. In the taxi back to Highbury, Chapman exclaimed: 'Wall, you now know how to conduct a transfer'."

The first five-figure sum in history, and for a 16-year-old trainee on £1.25 a week, it was nevertheless a fascinating glimpse of Chapman's acumen. (The fee quoted by Wall, who was present, is at variance with that given by other sources, some suggesting the deal was £11,500 and conducted in Manchester by the then director George Allison.) Jack, himself a hard bargainer, had demanded various concessions and first consulted his father, effectively his agent in those days, before consenting. His debut in October saw Arsenal's first victory at St James's Park for 17 years, Newcastle being beaten 3-0.

The season's final League position improved only one place on the previous year, to ninth, behind champions Sheffield Wednesday. Nevertheless, the crowds were beginning to flock to Highbury. Chapman's skill in marketing his team, for arousing public interest, was the equal of Matt Busby of Manchester United, Bill Shankly with Liverpool and Jock Stein with Celtic in later years. His mind was permanently searching for novelty, wherever it could advance his team or the game itself. In 1929, he sought permission from the League to introduce the semi-circle on the edge of the penalty area to ensure that players kept their 10-yard distance at a penalty kick, having seen this on the continent. He was refused. Four years later, the England selection committee witnessed this addition in Switzerland, and it was introduced in England in 1937.

Furthermore, Chapman experienced growing alarm at England's self-imposed isolation from the continental game through their withdrawal from FIFA in 1928. Witnessing first-hand the rise of Austria, and seeing England lose to Spain in Madrid in 1929, Chapman was forthright in his criticism. "Three years ago, when I said English superiority would be challenged, I was told I was exaggerating. Now it has come true." He recommended that the England selection committee be cut from seven to three, and that England players should train together regularly. It would be decades before this happened.

Despite the arrival of Jack, after four seasons in charge Chapman recognised that there was still something missing from his plans. The thirdback system, or WM formation as it came to be known – three defenders, four wing-half/insideforward players in midfield, and two wingers with a centre-forward up front – needed the presence of a mastermind in midfield. At Huddersfield Town, Chapman had had Clem Stephenson, the ideal creator of openings. To clinch achievement in his fifth season, he decided to make a move for Alex James, of

Preston North End. Here was a player whose name was on everybody's lips. He had been a member of the glittering Scotland attack that had slaughtered England the previous year, earning the nickname of the Wembley Wizards. There was one problem. James, who had moved from Raith Rovers to Preston, was known as a goalscorer. Though Preston had placed a price on him of only £9,000, Chapman had to convince James that his silken touch was such that he could be converted into the playmaker who would transform Arsenal's tactics. James was reputed to have stated, in his assertive Scottish manner and in a tongue that was indecipherable to many: "I'm never going to chase an opponent who is in possession of the ball." Furthermore, at the time of Arsenal's interest, James was less than fit, kicked so often from hip to ankle by unscrupulous defenders that he was in almost permanent pain.

Chapman, as ever, managed to get his man, convincing him that the tactical strategy he had in mind was within James's scope. Manager and player would have a five-year relationship that fluctuated emotionally, if ultimately successfully, between collaboration and confrontation. It would require a degree of tolerance from Chapman, allowing his star a licence not permitted to others, living it up at nightclubs until the early hours, flaunting his individualist, long baggy shorts which simultaneously allowed him to wear waist-to-ankle underpants during the colder months without the public noticing.

Arsenal began the 1929/1930 season well, winning four of their first five games, but from mid-September to mid-February they won only another five, during which time they lost 11. Thus they were nearer to relegation than the title and Chapman was, for a time, reduced to something close to panic. James's form was initially a disappointment, and soon the crowd was on his back, knowing nothing of the extent of his chronic injuries. After Whittaker had first examined James's swollen legs and ankles, he went to tell Chapman: "You've signed an outand- out crock." James had concealed from Chapman the full extent of his injuries and would admit in his autobiography: "In my first game against Leeds, every movement was an effort, and I couldn't get going. Added to that, I was a stranger to the team and it would have been surprising had I made a hit." Whittaker, in continuing his diagnosis of numerous deepseated bruises, realised that there were many weeks' work to return James to proper fitness, but the public criticism continued. Chapman would claim: "The [public's] dead set which was made against him was deliberately manufactured to hurt the Club as well as the player – one of the meanest things I have ever known."

Part of the resentment, oddly, stemmed from the fact that in addition to James, Chapman had signed an exceptional 17-year-old from Exeter City for a mere £2,000. Cliff Bastin was spotted playing at Watford when Chapman had

gone to look at another player. Bastin, a peaceful country-loving young boy training as an electrical engineer, was wary of moving to the metropolis but, impressed by Chapman's enthusiasm, had eventually agreed. "He cast me in the role of a sort of football Dick Whittington," recalled Bastin, who on arrival at Highbury was swiftly christened "Boy" Bastin, a name that stuck throughout his career. He was to become a phenomenal winger after conversion by Chapman from insideforward and within two years would win the FA Cup, the League title and England honours, all before his 21st birthday. However, it was not until February 15 that he scored his first goal. He and James, eventually achieving full fitness, took time to integrate. James, claiming that his methods had not been understood, said: "Now that we all work together smoothly, I'm told how well I'm playing. Frankly, that defeats me. I've never altered my style one bit."

The team stabilised in the new year and would eventually finish a moderate 14th in the League. Young Bastin was taking time, like James, to find his feet. Indeed, following a wretched performance against Sheffield Wednesday, James was dropped for the opening Cup match against Chelsea. Bastin scored in a 2-0 victory, sweeping in from the left flank to meet a low cross from Hulme. Three seasons later the pair were to score more than 50 goals between them. Meanwhile, James was sent home for a fortnight's rest to nurse his injuries, having injections to ease the pain and help him sleep. In the next round, Birmingham forced a draw at Highbury. Faced with a replay, Chapman gambled. Going round to James's house at the beginning of the week, he marched into the bedroom – such was the proprietorial attitude of managers in those days, even Chapman's – to say: "Get up and report for training. You will be playing at Birmingham." Chapman had precisely judged James's nature. Given such a challenge, he climbed out of bed and contributed to a crucial 1-0 victory in which Alf Baker scored a rare goal from the penalty spot.

The fifth and sixth rounds of the Cup were anything but easy, both away, but resulting in a 2-0 win over Middlesbrough and a 3-0 victory at West Ham. The semi-final at Elland Road, Leeds, should have been simple. Hull City were bottom of the Second Division and would be relegated a few weeks later. Fortunately for Arsenal, or so it seemed, Huddersfield Town and League champions Sheffield Wednesday, two of the most powerful clubs in the country, had been drawn against each other. Yet to their astonishment, not to say Hull's, Arsenal quickly found themselves two down following goals from James Howieson and Andrew Duncan. Arsenal were beginning to panic, and there were only 10 minutes remaining when Jack drove home a centre from Hulme.

The equalising goal with which Bastin rescued the day, racing through to score from a pass by James, was described by Bernard Joy – to become

Arsenal's centre-half in the late 1930s, and the last amateur to play for England's full international XI – as the most important moment in Arsenal's entire history. But for this goal, the legend of Chapman and Arsenal's all-conquering series of triumphs might never have occurred. The replay was a travesty, tackling on both sides being wild, Hull's centre-half being sent off and the only goal coming from Jack. Immediately prior to the replay, Jack had captained England against Scotland, the first Arsenal player to be thus honoured and a privilege subsequently matched by Hapgood and George Male.

If the semi-final was best forgotten, the final at last gave substance to Chapman's ambitions, and confirmed the genius of James – not least because the two-goal victory came against Chapman's former protégés of Huddersfield. "No man has ever come out of a Cup Final with so many honours as James," trumpeted the *Daily Mail*. "Surely he has at last justified himself." The pride for Chapman as he led Arsenal on to the turf at Wembley must have been fulfilling – 70 per cent of the players on the two sides substantially owed their own prestige to him. Huddersfield were undoubtedly the favourites. They had eliminated past winners of the Cup in every round, while Arsenal's opponents, like themselves, had never won the trophy. A benefit in Chapman's preparations was, of course, that he intimately knew the abilities and tactics of his opponents, the most dangerous of whom was the Scotland winger Alex Jackson, scorer of nine of 11 goals on Huddersfield's way to the final. Yet so effective at left-back was Hapgood, at 21 the youngest on the field bar Bastin, that Jackson was kept uncharacteristically subdued. If Chapman had beforehand planned and refined every move of the final, none of this seemed seriously to have touched James, spontaneous in almost everything he ever did, on or off the field. "I never worry about any match, I'm not given to excitement," James told readers of his column in the *Daily Express* beforehand.

True or not, James was ignoring the fact that, so far, he had done nothing with Arsenal to add to the fame he had earned with Preston North End and Scotland. And he admitted afterwards: "I wonder what Herbert Chapman would have done had we not won the Cup. If he did not make good, well, he was no use to Arsenal and would have to go. They paid £9,000 for me, but if we hadn't won at Wembley, I'm fairly certain I would have been up for sale again."

Anxieties for Arsenal were an injury to Jack, which in the event reduced his effectiveness in the second half, and the uncertainty in goal of Charlie Preedy, who self-deprecatingly referred to himself as "the worst keeper in the world". Chapman, according to Whittaker, at times had to cover his eyes with his hands when Preedy was in action. To put his men in the right mood, Chapman had a gramophone in the dressing room, playing contemporary hit numbers from

Harry Roy, Ambrose and Al Jolson.

With 15 minutes gone, James was fouled just outside the penalty area. In a ruse discussed prior to the game, James, without waiting for the referee's whistle, pushed a quick pass forward to Bastin, who ran wide, then doubled back inside his full-back to sweep a pass into the stride of James, whose first-time shot produced a stunning goal. Huddersfield rushed to protest. The referee was unmoved: within the laws, he had given James a signal with the hand which was sufficient.

The irony of this swift thinking between two of Arsenal's finest players was that Chapman had previously been irritated by James's propensity for utilising the quick free kick. Thereafter, Arsenal were hard-pressed to cling to their lead, and in the second half were under continuous pressure. James, against his nature, was more defender than schemer, yet his ability to steady the ranks when gaining possession, to give his colleagues time to breathe and re-gather their thoughts, proved crucial, together with Hapgood's control of the flying Jackson. With only seven minutes remaining, it was James's skill that sealed victory. Holding the ball long enough to make Huddersfield uncertain what he would do, he finally played a pass directly down the middle between Huddersfield's fullbacks, enabling Jack Lambert to outpace the centre-half and beat the goalkeeper. In anyone's judgment, this had been James's day.

Triumph at Wembley, in keeping with Chapman's five-year promise, gave Arsenal a new aura, an undeniable landmark amid a mountain of conflicting criticism and praise. The criticism was directed at alleged defensiveness and "Bank of England" spending, the praise at Chapman's innovative ideas and the individualism of his star players in what was at last recognised as an integrated team. Arsenal were simultaneously the best-loved and the most-hated club in the country.

Matt Busby often played against them as a winghalf for Manchester City and in later years would regularly refer to "the magnificent Arsenal of the early 1930s". Busby recognised the genius of James: "The number of goals created from rearguard beginnings by James were the most significant factor in Arsenal's greatness." With the pace of Hulme and Bastin on the flanks, the attraction of Arsenal's style was the swiftness of their counter-attacks, James being the fulcrum. Anyone watching Arsenal was guaranteed entertainment, and at the time of the economic depression of the early 1930s this provided an elixir that could not be ignored.

With the Cup won, Chapman's focus for the 1930/1931 season centred on the League title. It was to prove a spectacular season. Arsenal lost only four games. They won their first five, did not lose until their 10th, to Derby County, and

though Sheffield Wednesday and Aston Villa initially challenged strongly, their momentum faded in the spring. Arsenal's home and away records were identical, 14 wins, five draws and two defeats. During the summer season, the team had become convinced of their own capabilities. They knew just how good they could be, but under Chapman's guidance equally knew that they could not rest on their laurels.

Evidence of this was a tally of 126 goals during the season, an average of three for every League game. In the process they amassed a record 66 points, ultimately equalled by Spurs in 1960/1961 and surpassed by Leeds's 67 in 1968/1969, at the peak of Don Revie's management. The top scorer was Jack Lambert, who surpassed by seven Jimmy Brain's record in 1925/1926 of 31. Aston Villa topped Arsenal's goal tally with 128, which helped them take second place ahead of Sheffield Wednesday who, ambitious to complete a hat-trick of title wins, were 14 points adrift in third place.

Here were Chapman's aspirations brought to a pinnacle. Blackpool and Bolton Wanderers each suffered 4-1 defeats in the opening two games. Matching Arsenal's form, Villa led the table until November, when they travelled to Highbury and were thrashed 5-2, Bastin and Jack scoring twice each and Lambert once. Six points over Christmas enhanced Arsenal's lead. Still Chapman was looking for improvement, wanting a more complete centre-forward than that unfortunate workhorse of his day, Lambert, never mind his record goalscoring feats.

Form in the Cup faltered. After winning a replay against Villa on a frozen Highbury – wearing rubber studs introduced by Chapman – they went out in the next round to Chelsea. Such was the sporting nature of those days that rivals Aston Villa attended Arsenal's celebration banquet at the close of Chapman's greatest season. James, renowned individualist, had distinguished himself as a team player, subordinating his skills to exploit the abilities of his colleagues, though the *Sunday Despatch* would report in February 1931: "He drives the spectators into gales of laughter by the tricks he plays and the nonchalant way in which he performs them." Dismissed by some as a luxury player earlier in his career, he now truly could be called a playmaker. With Hapgood supreme at full-back, Herbie Roberts building an unshakeable reputation at the heart of defence and Hulme and Jack rampant on the wings, Arsenal were worthy of every superlative that was heaped upon them. First Cup, then League. Now, for the 1931/1932 season, Chapman's plans embraced the ultimate, the Double, last achieved in the previous century by Preston and Aston Villa, in a far less competitive era than Chapman's day.

The ambition was no less than was to be expected of a man whose mind was

always racing ahead. It was during the season that he advocated, in his column in the *Sunday Express*, the introduction of goal judges to aid referees in goalmouth decisions, a proposal that was to have a special relevance for Arsenal when once more reaching the Cup Final. He also suggested the introduction of a two-referee system.

A realistic view in contemplating the Double was that Arsenal needed a comfortable lead in the League by the commencement of the Cup in January. This was not to be. They began badly and never fully recovered, despite a surge in the new year. They were having more of the play in most matches than even the previous season, but the attack was not functioning efficiently. Because they were pushing too many men forward, especially wing-halves Charlie Jones and Bob John, they were leaving themselves vulnerable to the counter-attack. With Lambert once more under fire, Chapman went in search of other strikers, but not in time to make any difference. Ernie 'Tim' Coleman from Grimsby Town and Jimmy Dunne of Sheffield United were signed, Coleman at the end of the season and Dunne not until 1933. In long-term planning Frank Hill, a Scotland wing-half from Aberdeen, was signed as a replacement for Jones or John.

In Bernard Joy's opinion, John was the best wing-half to serve Arsenal prior to Joe Mercer's arrival after the war. In 16 seasons he played 421 matches, took part in 50 Cup ties, including three finals, and won three League titles. Having faltered in the League – where attacking with seven men proved to be a flawed tactic – fortunes improved in the Cup, beginning with the 11-1 defeat of Darwen from the Lancashire Combination League. There followed victories over Plymouth Argyle, Portsmouth and Huddersfield, reaching a semi-final against Manchester City. England winger Eric Brook was a constant threat, as were centre-forward Fred Tilson and the creative Busby. Chapman was already planning a replay when Bastin produced a career-defining moment. Firing the ball down the right flank to Lambert, he set off in support. In his last stride before the goal line, Lambert rounded left-back Billy Dale and hooked a cross into the middle. There was Bastin to drive home almost simultaneously with the final whistle.

With Arsenal trailing Everton by three points at the head of the League table, Chapman dismissed any remaining hope of the Double – the more so when James damaged a knee against West Ham over Easter. Arsenal did not win another match before the Final, and their improvement afterwards, taking seven points from four games, was too late; Everton were champions by two points. With James out of the running, George Male moved into contention for Wembley. He was playing centre-half for Clapton alongside Denis Hill-Wood, son of Sir Samuel.



Hill-Wood junior had pleaded with Chapman not to steal his colleague – "it would ruin our team" – but within days Chapman, recognising a fine player when he saw one, had signed the youngster. The squad now moved to Brighton to prepare for the Final and were joined on the Friday by James, who seemed to have come through an initial fitness test. Whittaker, still sensing some doubt, submitted James to a further test, himself challenging Arsenal's icon in a tackle. The knee collapsed again. The incident was surrounded by controversy. On the one hand Chapman had already announced his selection, with both James and Hulme, also injured, excluded. At the same time the *Daily Sketch* ran a story headlined: "The two fittest men in football out of the Cup Final." It was on account of Chapman's irritation at this story that James had been summoned to Brighton and subjected to the test. On surviving the first run-out, Chapman had changed his mind and ordered an adjusted team, with James included, to be released. It was not certain who had demanded the further test in which James collapsed. James suspected it was Chapman and was furious at what he regarded as being robbed of a Final appearance.

The team that took the field had Bastin replacing James at inside-left, John moving from left-half to the wing and Male replacing John. With hindsight of more than 70 years it seems a strange error by Chapman when it would have been simpler, surely, to have played John at inside-forward and left Bastin on the wing.

On top of this misfortune, the outcome against Newcastle at Wembley was determined by one of the more controversial goals in the history of the Cup. Against expectation, Arsenal dominated the early stages. The gamble on the left wing seemed to be working, and John had headed his team in front after 11 minutes after Newcastle's right-back Jimmy Nelson and goalkeeper Albert McInroy collided when both trying to meet a cross from Hulme, who had been passed fit after all. The sun seemed to be shining upon Arsenal until an apparent blunder by the officials shortly before half-time. Newcastle centre-half Dave Davidson intercepted Hapgood's clearance and sent Jimmy Richardson clear on the wing. Male funnelled Richardson towards the dead ball line, fatally relaxing when the ball seemed to run out over the line. As he did so, Richardson hooked a cross and centre-forward Jack Allen, unmarked, headed Newcastle level. WP Harper, a well-regarded referee, signalled the goal, to the astonishment of the Arsenal defence, awaiting a goal kick. "The ball was over," Male asserted. "I was there, I saw it."

This proved the turning point. Newcastle gained the upper hand, Chapman reshuffled the forward line and after Jack had squandered an easy chance, Allen scored again. Many expressed the view that Newcastle had deserved their

success through their superiority in the second half, Chapman included. "There are no excuses," he admitted. That was magnanimous, considering the absence of his most illustrious player. Newcastle were the first team to win a Wembley final after being behind.

Frustration at Highbury, at having come so close in both competitions, was considerable. What could be done in the 1932/1933 season? The answer was emphatic. The emergence of Male and the maturity of Roberts at centre-half compounded the Club's defensive strength, thereby encouraging the critics who sought to condemn them for being negative. Such a view was a nonsense, not least on account of the glittering season enjoyed by Bastin on the left wing, where he scored 33 goals in 42 games, the highest total for a winger in the senior English division. Moreover, having lost their opening match to West Bromwich, Arsenal then took 32 of the next 36 available points. On Christmas Eve, they annihilated Sheffield United 9-2 at Highbury, with the unappreciated Lambert hitting five. The best judges of the era regarded that particular performance as possibly the greatest at any time during Chapman's reign.

Another success had come off the field the month before, in negotiations with what is now London Underground. At that time Gillespie Road was still managed by London Electric Railway Company. Lengthy talks, including problems such as the need to reprint thousands of tickets and Underground maps, resulted in Arsenal now becoming a club with, uniquely, its own station name. Chapman argued it was an encouragement for their supporters to utilise the railway. On the day the deal was signed, November 5, 1932, Arsenal celebrated by trouncing Wolves 7-1, though sadly for the fans this match took place at Molineux.

Without a blip in authority on the field, the captaincy for the season had switched from Tom Parker at right-back to Hapgood on the left, Parker having departed in March to become manager of Norwich City. He was initially replaced by young Leslie Compton, quick and stylish, a perfect distributor but, early in his career, positionally suspect. Chapman's answer was to convert Male, a decision that initially left the young wing-half speechless. Since Male was almost the equal of Hapgood in technique and positional judgment, this gamble of Chapman's proved inspiring.

Male was the strong, silent type, symptomatic of his time. "I signed as a professional, but played as an amateur," he recalled in the 1950s. He was to share some glorious years at Highbury, personally winning four Championship medals up to 1948. It was typical of his nature that when he retired he donated his medals to Denis Hill- Wood, his colleague in the amateur Clapton team, as souvenirs for Arsenal. As a youngster he had been an attacking centre-half, in

the old-fashioned style, and signed for Chapman on the spur of the moment in the Lyons Tea Shop at Forest Gate, East London. "He was a marvellous bloke, kidded you along a bit, though only if you were any good," Male recalled. "He ruled the roost at Highbury; even the chairman couldn't come into the dressing room before a match. Yet we were all still playing for the love of the game." Not that there was too much else to play for – a regulation winning bonus was £1, the same even if you won two matches in a week.

A six-point lead at the turn of the year boosted confidence, which in turn became overconfidence, with defeats against Leeds United, Sheffield Wednesday and then Sunderland sounding a warning. Worse was to follow. In one of the most notable Cup upsets of all time, to be equalled only by Colchester's defeat of mighty Leeds in 1971, Arsenal fell at the first hurdle against lowly Walsall from the Third Division. The underdogs indulged in what is euphemistically termed "good, old-fashioned football", which means little attention was paid to the ball. The outcome, 2-0, delighted the knockers from Hadrian's Wall to Land's End, yet probably served to revitalise Chapman's men, freeing their path for the remainder of the season. Once again Chapman had refused to be pessimistic in defeat. Writing in the *Sunday Express*, he had said: "I hope it will be believed that Arsenal can take a licking as well as any club. It was a dreadful blow, but we offer no excuses. There were none." A significant side issue was that one of the worst fouls of a roughhouse match was by Tommy Black, of Arsenal. Intolerant of such behaviour, Chapman transferred him within weeks to Plymouth. Also, because Arsenal now had a blank date for the fourth round, a midweek trial team included at outside-left a rosy-cheeked boy not yet 15 named Denis Compton, younger brother of Leslie, playing in his second Colts match. More would be heard of him.

The Walsall defeat sparked a League revival, the team going unbeaten until March, the run concluding with an 8-0 win over Blackburn. Improvement regained Arsenal the lead in the League, with Sheffield Wednesday and Aston Villa in hot pursuit. At home to each of them in April, Arsenal met the challenge, defeating them 4-2 and 5-0 respectively. Once again the title was theirs, one of the most remarkable statistics of the season being the goalscoring rate of this allegedly negative team: 118, 26 more than Villa, the next highest. They had scored nine goals once, eight twice and seven once. Incredibly, wingers Bastin and Hulme had scored 53 between them (33 and 20 respectively). How many goals were created by James could not be calculated. A cloud over the celebration banquet was caused by James's absence, following one of the intermittent rifts with Chapman, on this occasion his refusal to go on a visit to Ireland for a friendly match. "After 40 matches that season, I considered I'd

done enough to justify my pay, and I'd taken a deuce of a lot of punishment," was what James had to say on the matter.

Despite his fame and the unprecedented public acclaim, James's equilibrium at Highbury was nevertheless uncertain. "I began to find life a little disturbing," he reflected, following the banquet incident. The temperament of the little Scot had always posed a particular dilemma for Chapman, obliged reluctantly to treat him differently from other players, giving him more rope for an idiosyncratic lifestyle than was permitted to others.

In the autumn of the new season, 1932/1933, James's injuries reduced his contribution to only a dozen games before Christmas. He was accused publicly, and not without evidence, of spending too much time in West End nightclubs. Chapman's response, to both injury and self-indulgence, was to send James on a boat trip that autumn. James idly supposed it would be on some luxury liner, but on arrival at the dock discovered it was a cargo boat to Bordeaux. To his credit, James took the surprise in his stride – and also the dressing room ribbing incurred upon his return.

Chapman was unquestionably dictatorial in his dealings with his players, even James, though treading a wary line. Bob Wall, his young assistant, would later refer to him as a benevolent autocrat. "But he would always listen to advice and, if he agreed, take it up immediately." Jack Crayston, shortly to become a pillar of the squad, recalled: "He expected you to behave yourself, that when confronted by the press we would try and help but not be controversial. We were encouraged to confide in the management if we had problems: financial, social, girls. We were like a family. We were friends, in excess of what it says in the dictionary."

James's attitude was predictably ambivalent: "He was the only real genius football has ever seen. Picture a middle-aged man, genial and smiling, shirt-sleeves rolled up, jacket off, bubbling with dynamic personality, a leader of men." And alternatively: "I did not like the way he did certain things, he didn't like my way either. So we bickered on, neither giving way, both too obstinate to consider the other fellow's point of view." (from James's autobiography *Life of a Football Legend*).

The 1933/1934 season was low key, even though the League title was retained. The James-Jack inside-forward partnership was at an end, Jack playing intermittently before leaving for Southend United as manager in May. Chapman targeted Ray Bowden of Plymouth as his replacement, then signed Ralph Birkett of Torquay United as successor to Hulme. After much delay Jimmy Dunne was finally bought from Sheffield United to replace Lambert, who moved to Fulham in October. Replacements for wing-halves Jones and John were Jack Crayston,

from Bradford Park Avenue and yet another of the mining fraternity whom Chapman so admired, and Wilf Copping from Leeds.

The constant switching of Bastin from wing to inside and back again was doing little to maintain continuity, but nonetheless Arsenal led the League table thanks to a spell of 27 points from a possible 32. Only the durability of the defence was maintaining the team's authority and in this respect a new First Division record was established, since the change in the offside rule, by the concession of only 47 goals.

With the arrival of Dunne, a more convincing streak was found in attack. The challenge this season was coming not from Villa or Wednesday but Tottenham Hotspur, under the captaincy of Arthur Rowe, as articulate in that role as Danny Blanchflower would be 25 years later. As the new year arrived, there was all to play for. Optimism, however, was cast down by Chapman's sudden death aged 55. He had caught a chill at the weekend, first watching Arsenal play at Birmingham City, then going to see Bury at home to Notts County, and on to Sheffield to watch United play Birmingham. Travelling back overnight, he insisted on continuing to go and watch the third team play at Guildford in bitter weather, saying that he had not seen them for several weeks. Returning home, he went to bed, his condition declined, and with the onset of pneumonia, he died at 3am on the Friday night.

Everyone at Highbury was stunned; it was as though the Club itself had died. Characteristically, Chapman had literally worked himself to death, and when taken ill had no resistance. An epoch had ended. Hapgood heard the news while shaving at his Finchley home. Neighbour Alice Moss, wife of the first-team goalkeeper, rushed in having seen placards of early Saturday editions of the evening papers. "I still had one side of my face lathered, and was so shocked that I stayed that way for some 15 minutes," Hapgood recalled. Whittaker, preparing at Highbury for that afternoon's game against Sheffield Wednesday, enquired of someone arriving at the office: "Heard how the boss is?" A pause. "He's dead."

Somehow the team managed to hold Wednesday to a draw. In the dressing room, nobody spoke other than in whispers. Two days later they travelled to Brighton for conventional preparation for the forthcoming Cup tie with Luton Town, Whittaker taking control of the team with assistant Joe Shaw, while managing director George Allison was in overall charge. Training was interrupted to return for the funeral at Hendon on Wednesday, where thousands gathered in the streets. At the parish church there were 240 wreaths, mostly in red and white, many from abroad. A congregation of 800 included official representatives from football at home and abroad. In his address, the Rev Norman Boyd, Chapman's friend and vicar, said: "In a game nothing matters so

much as the spirit in which it is played ... victory can be purchased at too great a price. In standing out for true sportsmanship, Herbert Chapman, loyally backed by his players, set a standard which has raised the sport he loved to the highest level." The pallbearers were Cliff Bastin, Eddie Hapgood, Joe Hulme, David Jack, Alex James, Jack Lambert. There was not a dry eye to be seen as the coffin was lowered.

Subsequently the reaction came. Three League matches in a row ended in defeat, two at home to Spurs and Everton, the former attracting a crowd of 68,828, a record for a midweek League match, with record receipts at Highbury of £5,347. Steadily, the calm attitude of Whittaker, together with Allison, reasserted normality. The Cup run ended against Aston Villa in the sixth round, but the team responded by overhauling Derby for the League leadership. Huddersfield were now threatening, but Arsenal held their ground by defeating Derby again on Good Friday. Huddersfield leapfrogged them but then had to visit Highbury on the Saturday following Easter. Recapturing their former style, Arsenal won 3-1 and confirmed their supremacy with a 3-2 victory at Anfield, even without Moss, Hapgood and Bastin, on duty for England against Scotland at Wembley. The title had been retained.

Such was the smooth running of the human machinery behind the scenes at Highbury that the sudden passing of one of the outstanding manager/coaches of all time did not lead to any immediate demise of the Club's illustrious standing. The principles that Herbert Chapman had established would continue after him, provocative though some of them were, often being in direct contradiction of previously expressed beliefs. For instance, he had campaigned for a limit on transfer fees, yet calculatedly went out to buy the best players in the land. He abhorred foul play, but bred and utilised some of the hardest of all players, such as Roberts, Hapgood and Copping. When the public accused him of being negative, he enjoyed making them eat their words via the entertainment provided by Hulme, Jack, James and Bastin. His like would not be seen again, but the continuing success of the Club was for the moment in good hands.

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **The buccaneer**



**Charlie Buchan was already in his mid-30s when he came to Arsenal, but his influence stretched beyond the goals he scored and the consummate style with which he played**

One of the finest players of the early part of the 20th century, Charlie Buchan, who was born in Plumstead in September 1891, was a physical contradiction. At 6ft 1in, Buchan had legs that seemed spindly and looked all wrong – that is, until they came into contact with the ball. Then his uncanny control on the ground and power in the air made him one of the most feared inside forwards. To look at him running, you would never suppose he could have such a silken touch.

Yet this was a different era for growing youngsters, these were still the days of horsedrawn trams. Going to school at Plumstead in south-east London and not having the fare, Buchan would run, attempting to outstrip the horse. He simultaneously dribbled a tennis ball, bouncing it repeatedly off the kerb until he could control it with either foot almost without thinking. There are players in the Premiership today who would be made to look fools attempting such an exercise.

In 15 seasons – with Leyton (one year in the Southern League), Sunderland (11 seasons) and Arsenal (three) – he scored 272 goals in 506 League matches. Because of his unconventional style, he gained only five England caps which, for a player consistently scoring about 20 or more League goals a season, was an aberration on the part of the selectors.

Though he was born of Scottish parents – his father was a colour-sergeant in a Highland regiment who then became a blacksmith at Woolwich Arsenal – Buchan was qualified to play for England. When Herbert Chapman became manager at Highbury, he was an obvious target, never mind that, in 1925, he was approaching 34.

Buchan's skill had been further developed on his boyhood practice pitch of Plumstead Common, an expanse of grassless gravel used as a manoeuvring ground by the Royal Horse Artillery. These were exactly the kind of conditions that perfected the footwork of Stanley Matthews, playing on waste ground covered in broken shards behind a pottery. Whenever possible Buchan would go to watch Woolwich Arsenal at the local Manor Field, on one occasion selling one of his school books when he didn't have the necessary three pence to gain admission (he subsequently got a telling-off from his headmaster). "In those days young players were brought up the hard way, meeting all types of opposition, from sedate schoolboys to hard-tackling senior teams in the district," Buchan

wrote in his autobiography *A Lifetime of Football*. "Against soldier, sailor or police, a youngster had to learn to take care of himself. No quarter was asked or given. But nowadays [the 1950s], he's nursed too carefully. He's taken in hand immediately after leaving school and often allowed to play only one game a week. He loses the benefits of the hardening process and takes years longer to mature."

While playing for Woolwich Polytechnic school, where he remained until 17, intending to become a teacher, he was spotted by Arsenal. Despite running the risk of offending his headmaster, he played a trial game and was subsequently selected as a reserve for the League side. After a month or so, having played in four games and trained two evenings a week at Manor Field, paying his own fare for away games, he submitted expenses for 11 shillings (55p). This was rejected. Understandably resentful, he did not play again for Arsenal for 16 years, until transferred to them from Sunderland in 1925.

He was approached at one stage, having played briefly for Northfleet in the Kent League, by Henry Norris, at that time chairman of Fulham and later to become chairman of Arsenal. Fulham would offer no more than £2 a week plus the guarantee of a teaching post. Buchan instead accepted £3 a week from Leyton, and a place in the first team, albeit in a lower division.

Having signed for Sunderland in 1911, in the next season there was an inquiry from the Scottish FA requesting his release for their next international. Buchan rejected this, preferring to utilise his England qualification. This soon came to fruition when he was selected for the Football League against the Scottish League. Though recovering from flu, he gave an outstanding performance in a 2-0 victory. A season later, Sunderland reached the FA Cup Final for the first time, losing by the only goal to Aston Villa, a defeat which denied them the Double after they had become League champions with a record of 54 points from 38 games.

He won his first England cap in the 1912/1913 season, against Northern Ireland in Belfast, when he scored in a 2-1 defeat. Here he had another of those confrontations with officialdom that marred his career. Returning frustrated to the dressing room, he overheard a linesman make critical remarks of his play and with youthful hotheadedness told him what he thought of him. Unfortunately, the linesman was also a member of the FA selection committee, and Buchan was not selected again until 1920/1921. Furthermore, requesting the cab fare home, he was told to take a tram. "At 6am on a Sunday!" he retorted.

In the wartime intermission, Buchan began army life as an acting, unpaid, Lance-Corporal. On being drafted to France he discovered that much of the time was spent playing football behind the lines. His first game was behind the

Somme front just after the big push in July 1916. From the pitch, they could see the spire of Arras church, a legendary landmark in that pointless conflict. When German shells began to fall, the players merely moved to another pitch. By now Buchan had been promoted to sergeant, and by the end of the war would become a commissioned officer, following a posting to the officer's cadet school at Catterick.

Remarkably, Buchan would write in his autobiography: "I got through the Somme, Cambrai and Passchaendaele battles without a scratch." It was while training at Catterick that he played a guest game for Leeds City, thereby having his first meeting with Herbert Chapman. Returning to Sunderland after the war, he took up teaching, but after two years relinquished this to open a sports outfitters in partnership with a former professional cricketer, Amos Lowings.

Buchan's form in the early 1920s was spectacular – 21 goals in 1921/22, 30 the following season, 26 the season after that. Sunderland were repeatedly challenging for honours in both competitions. In the third of these seasons, they led the League early in April, only to fade and finish third behind Huddersfield Town and Cardiff.

Buchan, who had bought out his partner Lowings at the outfitters, was serving one day when Herbert Chapman turned up out of the blue and said: "I've come to sign you for Arsenal." Thinking it was a joke, Buchan asked if Chapman had spoken to Sunderland, and was told he had. Buchan duly agreed. Sir Henry Norris, by now knighted and chairman of Arsenal, was sensitive to Buchan's advancing age and agreed a £2,000 fee with Sunderland and £100 for every goal he scored during his first season. In the event, this would double the fee, although Buchan always insisted that he lost money on the move because of a decline in business in his shop.

Buchan was, however, instantly impressed by Chapman's management and the spirit of friendship which ran throughout the entire staff at Highbury. "We discussed matters from all sides, ironing out any bones of contention. We soon became 100 per cent Arsenal players. That, I think, is the secret of the team's unrivalled success over the years. The Club comes first."

A distinctive aspect of Buchan's play was that he was one of the first to request, and exploit, the art of passing to a marked man, a tactic which, when accurately played, takes advantage of a player while simultaneously pinning down and excluding the marker. It was a practice that Buchan developed particularly with Joe Hulme, the outside-right signed from Blackburn Rovers. "He was not 21, but as fast as anything I've ever seen on the field. From the start, he showed signs of developing into a grand winger. Before his first match, at Leicester, I said to him that if I called for the ball, to give it to me straight at

my feet. The first time I did so he went haring up field with the ball as fast as he could go. When I asked him why he'd not given me the ball, he said: 'There was a player right on top of you.' Yet this was just the move I'd carried out since my days at Leyton."

Buchan's contribution to Chapman's ideals in the building of a great Club was greater than the records show – no League title, runnersup in the Cup in 1927, but 49 goals in three seasons. At the age of 37 he retired to become an equally renowned journalist, writing for the *News Chronicle* and launching his authoritative magazine, *Football Monthly*. He died while on holiday with his wife in Monte Carlo in 1960, aged sixty-eight.

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **Chapman's captain**

**Eddie Hapgood was the perfect captain for Herbert Chapman's Arsenal, being both supremely skilful and a great sportsman who led the Club to many triumphs**

In professional terms, Eddie Hapgood was almost too good to be true. Clean-living, a non-smoking, non-drinking fitness fanatic who was an exemplary captain of club and country, a fearsome physical opponent yet intent on fair play. He was also a respecter of social conventions and the generally accepted contemporary class distinctions, so it is perhaps no surprise that Hapgood was admired by everyone but often found close relationships difficult. In the perfect football world to which Herbert Chapman aspired – and to which he came thrillingly close – Hapgood was an ideal personal accomplice.

Aged 19, this former milkman from Bristol came into the Arsenal side from Kettering Town for only a small fee, and set about establishing himself with an attention to detail that would have shamed any rocket scientist. No sooner would one match end than he would begin mentally and physically preparing for the next. Rarely, if ever, had there been a better tackler. That is not to say that he battered opponents into the ground, but that by timing and positioning he achieved something that is beyond the scope of the majority of modern full-backs, namely removing the ball from an opponent and coming out of the tackle in controlled possession. In an era of man-to-man marking, rather than zonal defence, none excelled more than Hapgood.

Including wartime fixtures, he had 43 caps, 30 in peace time. Yet his most disarming quality of all was a total belief in himself. In his mind there was no winger in the world who could get the better of him. This could, at times, give the impression of conceit, though Hapgood was wholly without that failing. He was generous, magnanimous and unfailingly well-intentioned towards younger players growing up behind him.

Hapgood came to revere the Arsenal ethic to which he himself substantially contributed. "There was an atmosphere about back-stage Arsenal which was its very own," he wrote in his autobiography, *Football Ambassador*. "Even now, after being away from Highbury for over five years [1951], I can reach back into the past and get that grand old feeling. I was particularly sensitive to it, being chock-full of self-confidence myself. There was a feeling that, once you put on an Arsenal shirt, nothing could go wrong, that your team was better than all the others. Arsenal atmosphere, it was called by those on the outside, but we knew it was team spirit, an indefinable something which carried us to the heights, kept

us there, and which won us games that, by all laws and rights, we should have lost.

"Lucky, we were called at times, many times. Perhaps we were on the odd occasion, but we never forgot that, great though a player might be in an individual position, he was useless if the others weren't on the field with him. Mighty Arsenal, the Bank of England team, they've sometimes been called, the most publicised football team the world had ever known, and the greatest club side of all time maybe. I spent the greater part of my career as a member of that Highbury side. I think, in my small way, I helped to put them on the pedestal from which they will take a lot of knocking.

"Everything happened to Arsenal. Rarely a day passed that we didn't read something about ourselves. Some of it was far-fetched, a lot of it ridiculous, but all of it was Arsenal. Yet all the time that the papers were writing about our luxury grandstand, our cocktail bar, our special training methods, a cotton-wool diet for the players, our private train, and all the thousand and one everyday items which make headlines, Arsenal meanwhile were delivering the goods. In 10 seasons, from 1930-1939, we won the League title five times, the Cup twice, were runners-up once and were only three times out of the first three in Division One."

Like many other players, Hapgood owed a heavy debt to Tom Whittaker. Besides helping develop this undersized young full-back's physique on arrival from Kettering – increasing the diet at his digs and managing to counteract a susceptibility to concussion when heading the ball – Whittaker literally saved Hapgood from losing a leg, and during wartime rescued him from permanent serious injury. At one point in his Highbury career, Hapgood suffered a nasty knee injury and on the way to a match in Sunderland discovered that a minor wound had turned septic. Poisoning was visible above the knee and running up his thigh. Whittaker, inspecting the injury, drew a line on the thigh with his pen, saying: "If it gets above that line, you will be in serious trouble". Until four in the morning, he worked on Hapgood's knee, applying red-hot fomentations, to the extent that he was fit to play that afternoon with his leg strapped.

Another time, Hapgood leapt out of bed in the middle of the night to attend to his son, and in doing so knocked over a bowl of burning oil that gave off a vapour to aid his son's breathing. The oil flew over his stomach and lower limbs, and there was initially doubt whether he would ever play again. Taken every day to Highbury and placed on the treatment table, his burns were dressed at hourly intervals by Whittaker, who even washed and shaved him, with never a word of complaint. "After six weeks, I was able to walk about again, and felt a lot better," Hapgood recalled. "So much so that I told Tom that I was going to play



again. At first he flatly rejected the idea, but then concocted a leather harness, which I wore strapped round my body, muffled up with pounds of cotton wool. I was able to take my place in the team. Only Tom could have done that for me."

Hapgood's dedication was as devout as Whittaker's. Much of the time he trained on his own, preferring to slog away individually. "It was not that I didn't get on with the rest of the players, or thought that I knew more than Tom could teach me, but I felt I knew just how far I could go when I was training myself. Often I trained in the empty stadium. If ever there's a ghost at Highbury, he'll probably look like me. I'm glad Tom had that trust in me. One of my favourite tricks was to take a ball over the railings on the terracing, bang it up the slope and intercept it as it came bouncing down, cannoning off railings. Surprising how helpful this became."

As Club captain, Hapgood was the perfect foil for Chapman, having the same instinctive principles of fair play, team ethic and, as far as was possible in an imprecise art, perfectionism. "Chapman started that team spirit in his own wizard way, and it was fostered following his death by George Allison and all connected with the playing side of the team," recalled Hapgood. "Dirty play or shady tricks are not tolerated. We went out to play the game, and if we lost, well that was too bad. The team conferences helped us to understand the special difficulties connected with playing positions other than our own and, at the same time, helped us to find the weak spots in the opposition armour. The majority of players felt, as I did, the honour of playing for Arsenal. Chapman humoured us, even kidded us. He was a human dynamo himself, but he knew just how far to drive us. If he wanted us to grasp a certain point, off would come his coat and – using arms and legs to the danger of any unwary object which might be in the way – he would demonstrate exactly what he meant.

"Sometimes, conferences went on so long that we got the cane from our wives for being home late for lunch. These conferences moulded Arsenal. Chapman was a psychologist before the word became fashionable. Everything and everybody was discussed, who was to take the place of the goalkeeper if he was injured, on which wing an injured player was to operate when a team was reshuffled, who took free kicks in different parts of the field."

Hapgood had led England for the first time in the notorious match against Italy – World Cup winners that summer – at Highbury in November 1934. His first cap, as successor to Ernest Blenkinsop of Sheffield Wednesday, had also been against Italy in Rome the year before. The 1934 match, dubbed the 'Battle of Highbury', was his ninth cap and with Tom Cooper, the regular captain, injured, Hapgood took charge. Five Arsenal players were initially selected: Frank Moss, Wilf Copping, Ray Bowden, Cliff Bastin and Hapgood. When

Cooper dropped out he was replaced by George Male and at the last moment centre-forward Fred Tilson, of Manchester City, had to withdraw. He was replaced by Ted Drake, bringing Arsenal's contribution to seven – a record during the professional era.

"It was the dirtiest match I've ever played in," Hapgood recalled in his autobiography. "In 15 minutes we had the match apparently well won. Eric Brook, Manchester City's left-winger, headed home a cross from Stan Matthews, and two minutes later fired a second goal from a free kick. The Italians began to lose their tempers. [Within moments] Italy's right-half smashed his elbow into my face. I recovered in the dressing room, with the faint roar from the crowd greeting our third goal, by Ted Drake, while Tom Whittaker worked on my gory face. He told me my nose was broken, but as soon as he had finished dressing it, I ran on to the field again. By now the Italians were kicking everything in sight. It's a bit hard to play like gentlemen when [an opponent] is wiping his studs down your legs or kicking you in the air from behind."

Giuseppe Meazza scored twice to make it 3-2, but England held out. To be fair to Italy, the match was an early demonstration of different interpretations of the laws between Britain and much of the rest of the world, the British tolerating physical assault on an opponent's legs under the guise of 'going for the ball' – or the euphemistic term of 'getting stuck in'.

The latter part of Hapgood's career was less than happy. Stresses arose between him and Allison, and then with Whittaker, and eventually he departed to be manager at Blackburn Rovers, then subsequently Watford and Bath City. With the last, he took them to the second round of the FA Cup and was voted Southern League Manager of the Year in 1953. After losing his position at Bath in 1956, he requested a retrospective benefit from Arsenal of £750 and was disappointed when the Club declined. An appeal to the Football League was rejected. He later became a tennis coach, and warden of a hostel for apprentices with the Atomic Energy Authority. The hostel closed in 1970 and he died three years later.

**David Miller**

# Allison into the hot seat

Arsenal's directors, shocked though they were by Chapman's death halfway through the 1933/1934 season, had no immediate need to scour the football world for a replacement. They had on hand George Allison, the managing director, who had been associated with the Club since its days at Plumstead. In addition, there were Joe Shaw, Chapman's assistant team manager, and, of course, Tom Whittaker, cornerstone of the dressing room.

And that was how things continued. Allison took command of the overall playing side, with Shaw upgraded to team manager and Whittaker remaining what he was: eminence grise, confidante to the players, a figure of reassuring stability. The fact that Shaw avoided publicity was more than compensated for by the fact that Allison did not. Indeed, he revelled in it, an entrepreneur par excellence. One of Chapman's last functions had been to present Shaw with a gold watch, inscribed by the whole Highbury staff, in recognition of 25 years' service. Most important of all, under this new regime the players, steeled and conditioned by Chapman, continued giving their all, and in the 1933/1934 season, the League title was retained despite the emotional distress caused by the passing of a Napoleon of football.

Chapman had created a style and a stage without parallel in his time. His lifestory was effectively that of how English professional football came of age in a decade between the two great wars, and at Highbury he left not only an exceptional team but a stadium that was then the envy of the world, a reflection of Chapman's concern at the outdated facilities at many of the country's supposedly big clubs.

Allison might be about to prove himself a master of public relations, but no more so than Chapman, that amalgam of visionary and disciplinarian. Two years later, the Club were to unveil a memorial bronze bust in the marble hall of the East Stand. His closest friends formed a private club to take over financial responsibility for his dependents, even though he left over £6,000 in his will, no mean sum in those days.

Chapman's exceptional record over a 12-year period had been:  
**1921/1922** Huddersfield Town, FA Cup winners

**1923/1924** Huddersfield Town, League Champions  
**1924/1925** Huddersfield Town, League Champions  
**1925/1926** Arsenal, runners-up to Huddersfield in Championship (record points for London club)  
**1926/1927** Arsenal, FA Cup runners-up  
**1929/1930** Arsenal, FA Cup winners  
**1930/1931** Arsenal, League Champions (record 66 points)  
**1931/1932** Arsenal, runners-up in League and Cup  
**1932/1933** Arsenal, League Champions  
**1933/1934** Arsenal, League leaders at Chapman's death (and went on to retain title).

Only a few days before his death, Chapman had said to Allison: "The team's played out, we must rebuild." That may have been undue pessimism, or merely part of an unending production-line blueprint carried in his head. Whatever the truth of the matter, two months later Allison signed from Southampton one of the stoutest hearts ever to take the field for Arsenal or England: Ted Drake, a centre-forward with a degree of physical courage that left even his colleagues, never mind opponents, in awe.

Though Drake was a valuable influence in the 10 matches he played in the remainder of the season, he would not be permitted a Championship medal by a mean-spirited Football League, the minimum required figure being 14. Working as a gas-meter inspector, of as modest a disposition as George Male, Drake was in his third season at Southampton when he made the move and for the next five seasons much of Arsenal's fortunes would rest on his broad shoulders.

The impact of Allison was certainly substantial. Born in 1883, he was three years older than the club of which he now took charge at the age of 50. He was short and rotund, a self-confident man-of-the-world brimming with bonhomie, having a broad background in both business and media affairs. Allison was London correspondent of the *New York Herald* and the first to broadcast a radio football commentary in 1927, first on Arsenal v Sheffield United, then a famous Cup tie between Corinthians and Newcastle United. He became one of the most famous of the early broadcasters, covering in the same year the Derby and Grand National, the Cup Final and England v Scotland. His assistant was Derek McCulloch, later known to millions of children as Uncle Mac.

There is little doubt that his showman's instinct revelled in his new promotion. How much he actually knew about the game is another matter. There was a moment early on when he was pulled up short during a pre-match team talk. "The danger man for Sheffield Wednesday is Charlie Napier," he said to Jack Crayston, "and you have the job of marking him." Crayston attempted to

interrupt. "Wait a moment, let me finish," Allison retorted. Having concluded, Crayston then politely advised him that, though Napier "does play well for Wednesday", in fact on that day they were playing Blackpool. Allison, to his credit, took it in good heart.

Like Chapman, his lateral thinking was adept. It was he who initiated Arsenal's takeover of Margate FC in the Kent League as a nursery club for the development of young players. This was valuable for expanding the experience of young players in a proper competitive environment, though inevitably it was an expensive exercise. With some 20 boys in training on a wage of about £5 a week, this would have amounted to £30,000 over five years, not including coaches, groundsmen, physiotherapists and travelling expenses. It was a scheme that Arsenal would have to abandon following financial cutbacks after World War II.

With his media background, Allison had been schooled to think on his feet. There was a time when he was on night duty while working at the *Daily Mirror* and an agency report came in of a fire at an international exhibition in Brussels. The British Pavilion, including a major jewellery exhibit, was threatened with destruction. Calling the off-duty night editor for advice, Allison was told to think of the women readers, and their anguish at the thought of all those diamonds going up in flames. It was an early lesson in the business of playing to the public. Allison admitted later that when the Club developed its famous new grandstands in the 1930s, he felt he had missed a trick by not considering the possibility of including (as had Wembley) the opportunity for dog racing. In fact, hindsight suggests that would have marred Highbury's unique feel as a football stadium.

Allison was essentially a stage manager rather than a team manager, and in team affairs there was a mixed view of him. A school of thought, of which Cliff Bastin was the leader, viewed him as less than proficient, benefiting from inheriting a ready-made team. "He may have had the name of Arsenal splashed all over the front pages, but he lacked Chapman's gift for getting the best out of players," Bastin said.

Alex James, on the other hand, would merely say after several seasons: "The record book gives you the answer. Allison has triumphed." James preferred the less confrontational relationship he enjoyed with Allison. "In my three and a half years under George I never had a single barney, which was more than you could say with Chapman." Whatever the truth, Allison's time in charge produced creditable results – 1934: League Champions, FA Cup sixth round; 1935: League Champions, FA Cup sixth round; 1936: sixth in the League, FA Cup winners; 1937: third in the League, FA Cup sixth round; 1938: League Champions; 1939:

fifth in the League.

With the formidable Drake – said to have a kick in either foot "like a Spanish mule" – in the vanguard, Arsenal galloped through the 1934/1935 season to their third consecutive title, emulating Huddersfield Town. Drake's contribution was an astonishing 42 goals in 41 matches (his Arsenal total was 124 goals in 168 League games). His most famous feat was scoring all of the goals in a 7-1 victory over Aston Villa on December 14, 1935. In this season, the team topped a century of goals for the third time in five years, recording an average of almost three per match. So much for the allegation of defensive football. In June, Allison relinquished the role of director to become secretary-manager, as League regulations forbade paid employees to be directors. His first sortie, following the acquisition of Drake, was to buy Jack Crayston from Bradford and Wilf Copping from Leeds as replacements at wing-half for Charlie Jones and Bob John. This visibly raised the status of the team still further. Two contrasting characters, the elegant Crayston and the bludgeoning Copping – who went unshaven on match days to enhance his tough-guy image – added authority either side of Herbie Roberts.

It was rumoured that Crayston, superb in the air and with a throw-in capable of landing the ball in the goalmouth, had brittle bones. Allison's safeguard on the transfer fee was to pay £4,000, with additional sums per game after 10 appearances. Copping, another Yorkshire ex-miner, once reset his own broken nose during a match so as to continue playing. This unlikely pair were the closest of friends off the field as well, room-mates at away matches and playing partners at golf.

David Jack was the most notable departure, leaving to become manager of Southend United. It was he who had scored the first-ever goal at Wembley, the first of two for Bolton Wanderers against West Ham United in the 1923 FA Cup Final. He had been a particularly laid-back player. Tom Whittaker once had to go looking for him when he failed to arrive for training on a Thursday, finding him at his lodgings, in slippers and smoking a pipe. "We never trained on Thursdays at Bolton," Jack said. Ted Drake, on the other hand, could not be kept away, and his effervescent spirit, whether in training or on match days, gave the team a special injection of morale. "I couldn't believe my luck when I was told at Southampton that George Allison had been on the phone," Drake recalled. "Everybody wanted to play for Arsenal. I was playing in the Second Division, had been scoring a few goals, generally doing well, and also playing a bit of cricket for Hampshire. I was happy there, but couldn't resist the offer; Arsenal had some of the best players in the world." The fee was a moderate £5,000, but his spectacular form quickly made Drake a darling of the terraces, and kept

earlier signing Jimmy Dunne out of the side.

The season started dramatically, with the first four home games generating 21 goals including an 8-1 demolition of Liverpool. All was not so well away from home, with only a single victory before the new year (a 5-2 hammering of Chelsea in which Drake scored four), but title challengers failed to take advantage of this. There were also injuries to several players – Eddie Hapgood, Joe Hulme, Copping and Bastin – which kept them out for lengthy spells. The last two would need cartilage operations in the summer.

Strength in depth would be a key element in winning the three titles, the Combination XI gaining their League title for the seventh time in nine years. Arsenal were aided by the fluctuation in form of their rivals, Tottenham Hotspur being relegated, Huddersfield, Aston Villa and Derby County all failing to impress. FA Cup holders Manchester City started menacingly. Their distinguished half-back line, which included Matt Busby and Jackie Bray, was almost equivalent to Arsenal's and they had Frank Swift behind them in goal, but City fell away in late autumn.

The season was punctuated in November by an intended friendly international match against Italy that came to be known as the Battle of Highbury. The distinction of the selection, if not the match, was Arsenal's provision of seven players, Frank Moss in goal, Hapgood and Male at full-back, Copping at half-back, and Ray Bowden, Drake and Bastin in attack, not to mention Whittaker as trainer. Play was not aided by a frost-bound ground, and the Italians soon started to react to characteristically physical challenges from the likes of Hapgood, captain for the first time, and Copping.

While English viewers considered this to be the best match Copping played for his country, a dispassionate opinion would be that the occasion served to demonstrate, not for the first or last time, the gulf in interpretation of the laws between British and Continental teams.

England were three up in 15 minutes. By then Italy had been reduced to 10 men, their centre-half having gone off with a fractured foot. Hapgood retired to the dressing room with a broken nose and though England won 3-2, Eric Brook, Manchester City's left-winger, as well as Hapgood, needed hospital treatment. Drake, Bastin and Bowden were also badly injured.

With the arrival of heavier grounds in the new year, Arsenal's performance perversely accelerated. Three League and two FA Cup games were won without a goal conceded, though luck was against them in the Cup, with four consecutive away ties. The first two games, against Brighton & Hove Albion and Leicester City, were won without difficulty, while a single goal from Bastin was sufficient to end Reading's unbeaten home record.

In between these ties, Alex James hit a League hat-trick against Sheffield Wednesday at Highbury. Given undue time and space by the opposition, James made hay, not least because he had been taunted by his 13-year-old son about his lack of goals. In spite of this result, however, Arsenal went down 2-1 away to Wednesday in the Cup, which the Sheffield side went on to win. Meanwhile, Sunderland had taken over at the head of the League table.

A fillip for Arsenal was the rapid rise of new winger Alf Kirchen. Allison had been obliged by Tom Parker, now manager of Norwich City, to double his initial offer of £3,000, but in the event. Kirchen emulated Drake in attacking zest and was to surpass Hulme – in the opinion of Bernard Joy – as Arsenal's best right-winger up to that time. Arsenal regained the lead, and a key encounter was Sunderland's visit to Highbury on March 9. In front of a 73,295 crowd, honours were even after a 0-0 draw in a defensive game. Next, courage assisted victory over Everton at Goodison Park. Goalkeeper Frank Moss dislocated his shoulder but returned to play on the wing, with Hapgood going in goal. With Arsenal leading 1-0, Moss cut into the middle to score a vital second, before again dislocating his shoulder and departing to hospital.

With only a day remaining before the transfer deadline and having only one reserve keeper, Alex Wilson, on the staff, Allison was able to sign George Bradshaw from Everton. Wilson adequately filled the gap left by Moss, and Arsenal completed their programme, despite a home defeat by Derby on the last day, with a four-point lead over Sunderland.

They had assured themselves of a special place in football lore, yet in spite of what might legitimately be termed a glorious season, the accusation of negative play continued to dog them. *Thomson's Weekly News* opined in 1935: "Arguments are going round as to how long Arsenal can keep their present negative style and continue to draw big crowds. The world loves a winner, but the safety-first football of the Gunners seems to be losing some of its appeal. A harmful result is that other clubs have copied it but, not having players to do it, much drab football has been our weekly portion."

Alex James, in his biography, dismissed this out of hand. "If blame is to be apportioned for any decline in English football standards when measured against progress on the Continent, then it must lie elsewhere. The Arsenal of the 1930s was constructed first and foremost as a response to the demands of English League football. Chapman was well aware of the accusations levelled at the team ... so severe is the competition we are compelled to sacrifice ambitions for effect. For us, it is a case of goals and points. At times one is persuaded that nothing else matters."

In the hat-trick of Championships, 1932-1935, the following is a list of those



who played, out of a possible 126 appearances, those exceeding 50 given in brackets: Bastin (114), Beasley, Birkett, Bowden (63), Coleman, Leslie Compton, Cope, Copping, Cox, Crayston, Davidson, Dougall, Drake, (51), Dunne, Hapgood (112), Haynes, Hill (66), Hulme (64), Jack, James (92), John (77), Charlie Jones, Kirchen, Lambert, Male (116), Marshall, Moss (112), Parker, Parkin, Preedy, Rogers, Roberts (102), Sidey, Stockhill, Trim, Wilson.

After a six-year run of trophy hunting, the public perception had become one of "Arsenal will win something". Could the spell be sustained? Whatever the wearying effect emotionally of the League Treble, the 1935/1936 season began with a comfortable home win over Sunderland, including two fearless headers from Drake, still in fine form. But only one other victory followed in the next six matches.

If results were mixed, however, attendances stayed high. There would be over a million spectators at Highbury during the season and a crowd of 82,905 watched when they played out a 1-1 draw with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in October. This was a League record until it was surpassed in January 1948 when Arsenal played Manchester United at Maine Road. Injuries continued to dog Arsenal: Moss was still out of action and Herbie Roberts, Drake, James, Bastin, Copping and Crayston were all intermittently suffering. Yet the injury list was less severe than the previous season, and it had to be admitted that, with those such as James and Roberts in the twilight of their careers and some others predictably running out of inspiration, an element of *déjà vu* was inevitable. Moreover, clubs such as Brentford and Charlton Athletic, rising from the lower divisions, were providing fresh challenges at a time when others, besides Arsenal, were on a downward slope. A notable example was Villa, who in December had had the unwelcome distinction of being on the receiving end of Drake's historic achievement of scoring all the goals in a 7-1 defeat. The fact that his left knee was heavily bandaged, after he had twisted it in the previous game, was hardly noticed. Two days earlier he had visited an unwell Allison in hospital and had been told the two points against Villa were essential. Characteristically, Drake responded with a display that will surely stand for all time, only marginally challenged by George Best's six for Manchester United in an FA Cup tie against Northampton Town in February 7, 1970.

Arsenal's 7-1 win, in front of a 60,000 crowd, was a reflection of the decline of Villa that was far more advanced than Arsenal's. It was, for them, a humiliating day. They had spent hugely attempting to get out of trouble, yet in the previous game had conceded five goals away to Manchester City. In the first half-hour against Arsenal, Villa had done most of the attacking, yet found themselves three goals down. Not the least remarkable aspect of Drake's

achievement was that in the entire game he had only eight shots. It took 13 minutes to hit the first, with the help of two defensive errors. Another 13 minutes and Bastin's through-pass sent Drake away, shouldering off two defenders for perhaps his best goal of the season. Number three came when a deflection luckily put Drake onside in front of an open goal. Two minutes into the second half, a close-range feint brought the fourth; three minutes later a deadly drive from a partially cleared corner. Another five minutes, and a blast from outside the penalty area made it 6-0. Villa finally pulled one back, but three minutes from time Drake hammered his seventh from Bastin's cross.

Meanwhile, Sunderland, inspired by one of the finest inside-forwards in English history, Raich Carter, were confidently leading the League table, all but unbeatable at home where they won their first 10 games. For Arsenal to retain any hope they had to win the return game with Sunderland at Roker Park at the end of December. In the event, it was one of the outstanding matches of the season, but unhappily not in Arsenal's favour. Sunderland hit a peak, scoring five times. Arsenal's courageous response was to score four, pressing furiously for a draw with a quarter-of-an-hour to go. But defeat left them eight points adrift, their League challenge effectively over. So how about the Cup?

Bristol Rovers were beaten 5-1 in the third round, thanks to two goals each from Drake and Bastin and one by Ray Bowden. In the fourth round, away to Liverpool, Arsenal produced what was left of their best to win 2-0. Away to Newcastle in the fifth round – never having beaten them in the Cup – they had to field reserves for Moss, Roberts and Drake, the latter out of action for a cartilage operation. Arsenal took the lead three times but were ultimately held to a draw. With Roberts returning, and Bastin scoring from two penalties, the replay was won 3-0. Barnsley went down 4-1 in the sixth round and a single goal from Bastin disposed of Grimsby Town in the semi-final.

Assessed by a Football League investigation, Arsenal were fined for fielding weakened teams in the League. There was a danger that Drake, short of rehabilitation time following his knee operation, could miss the Final against Sheffield United. The week before, he returned for the league match against Villa at Highbury, and his match-winning goal was the final nail in their coffin, sending them into the Second Division for the first time in their history. Going into the Final, Allison also had anxieties about Roberts, James and Hapgood, but they recovered sufficiently to play. Allison did shuffle the attack, with Bowden at inside-forward and Bastin, having spent much of the season playing inside, returning to the left wing, to the exclusion of Pat Beasley.

It was an undistinguished Final. Sheffield were mostly on top, narrowly failing to take the lead in the first minute when Wilson, playing in goal in place

of Moss, dropped the ball. On the half-hour Jock Dodds, Sheffield's centre-forward, struck the crossbar and there remained no score until quarter-of-an-hour from the end. Bastin intercepted a clearance and glided the ball down the middle to Drake, who sidestepped centre-half and captain Harry Hooper and struck a typically fierce drive past John Smith in goal. Sheffield attacked for the remainder of the game and were particularly unfortunate when Dodds hit a post. Drake had been in such pain when he scored, falling in the process, that James and Bastin had to help him to his feet.

One sour aside to the afternoon was Allison's failure to inform Hapgood that he had been relieved of the captain's duty, which passed to James. It was not the first rift between Allison and Hapgood – or the last.

Two days after the final, Allison received a letter from David Danskin, founder of the Club in 1886, who was by now 73 and ill in hospital. He had listened enthralled to the broadcast; it was a rewarding moment for him, with memories of having to raise 10 shillings 50 years earlier to purchase a new ball. Yet for Arsenal, a narrow victory could not camouflage the fact that a long honeymoon was over. No longer were Chapman's team, under the care of Allison, the undisputed masters. There was rebuilding to be done in 1936/1937. Alex James played only 19 League games during that season and formally retired after the final game, on May 1, after a goalless draw against Bolton. That alone marked the end of an era.

However, a factor giving Allison cause for optimism was the lack of obvious threat from rival clubs. Sunderland, Preston, Huddersfield, Wolves and Derby all had potential, but none could find the continuity that had marked Arsenal's performances over recent past seasons. If Allison could find an adequate replacement for James, all might still flourish in Arsenal's garden.

One of the least expected events of 1936/1937 was the late run by Manchester City to take the title – then followed by their inexplicable slide into the Second Division the following season. Arsenal made an indifferent start, but then a winning run placed them among the leaders, though it was mid-October before they gained their first away win, 2-0 at Charlton. Having then slumped to 17th, another short run, winning all four matches in November, pushed them back up to third. Continuing steady form, with five points over Christmas, took them to the top of the table by the time the Cup started in January.

In the third round against Chesterfield, just promoted to the Second Division, Arsenal played soundly, winning 5-1. They followed this with another five goals without reply against Manchester United. A 7-1 victory away to Burnley in the fifth round saw four goals from Drake, as Arsenal's physical strength carried the day. But the sixth round found them halted by West Bromwich Albion, melted

snow creating a heavy, difficult pitch. With Drake absent injured, Kirchen was moved to centre-forward, and his replacement on the right wing, Jackie Milne, was injured and missing for the second half. With West Bromwich already two in front, the outcome was hardly in doubt. Bastin pulled one back, but Mahon added a third for Albion – a disappointing result for an Arsenal side who did the League double over the same opponents.

Having dropped to second place in the League, Arsenal regained the leadership when beating Liverpool, but draws with Huddersfield, Manchester United, Charlton, Birmingham and Stoke – all opponents who Arsenal formerly would have expected to beat – undermined their prospects. So did a further injury to Drake who, having scored 27 goals in 29 games, was obliged to miss the final seven games of the season.

If this was one aspect of a failure to close in on the title, the other was the rise of Manchester City, led with imagination by that wily Irish midfielder Peter Doherty. If Arsenal were to halt City, they would have to do so at Maine Road on April 10. Unhappily, a serious injury had put Herbie Roberts out for the rest of the season, and he was replaced by Joy. Arsenal dominated at the start and Dave Nelson, an unfamiliar figure at outside-left, hit the bar. To Joy's misery, his error allowed City to go in front, and they finished 2-0 winners. Subsequently winning away to Sunderland and Preston, City deservedly took the title, with Arsenal finishing third. City were the only team to score more than 100 goals.

Here was confirmation, if any were needed, of Arsenal's relative slide. Besides the absence of James, Hapgood had lost his edge at full-back and was replaced at times by Leslie Compton. Hapgood was also dropped by England, George Male taking over as captain.

Allison knew, and so did most Highbury spectators, that the immediate future demanded a replacement for James. In his prime, Bastin's strength had been as a fulsome goalscorer – switching him from the wing back to his former position at inside-forward had not been the answer. There was also no sense in talk of converting him to wing-half, though he had some limited success in attempting to fill that position.

Allison had looked for a solution among youngsters from Margate without discovering the answer. However, there had been the arrival from Bradford City of goalkeeper George Swindin, one of the costliest keepers thus far. He had succeeded Wilson at the beginning of the 1936/1937 season, but poor form led him to be replaced by Frank Boulton, a recruit from Bath City. He was one of a number of newcomers along with Denis Compton, Dave Nelson, Reg Lewis, Eddie Carr, Gordon Bremner and Mal Griffiths. Swindin became reliable only in his later years, after World War II.

It could not have been expected, in the circumstances, that Arsenal would regain the League title in 1937/1938. With James, Hulme and Roberts either gone or over the hill, they were no longer the frightening team of the past. Nevertheless, they took the title for the fifth time in eight years, with exactly the same number of points, 52, with which they had come third behind Manchester City the previous season. They had lost 11 games, the highest number in any season in the 1930s (other than 1935/1936 when they lost 12), and they scored only 77 goals. This was their lowest total since 1929/1930, apart from 1933/1934 when they notched up 75. The team were unsettled and inconsistent. Joy, a former Corinthian Casuals amateur, replaced Roberts, but was still learning the professional game, and Bastin, Male and Hapgood were the only survivors from the years of eminence.

The battle for the title would be with Wolves, led by dynamic centre-half Stan Cullis in defence and the mercurial Bryn Jones in attack. Wolves, at their best on heavy ground – to which end they would illegally water their pitch – faltered only when grounds dried out towards the end of the season.

The season proved to be a double duel between these two clubs, for they also clashed in the Cup. Having first disposed of Bolton, with two goals from Bastin before half-time and another by Kirchen, Arsenal met Wolves in the fourth round. Early in September, they had put five past Wolves at home and now, a week before the Cup tie, played them at Molineux where, though Arsenal played well, Wolves won 3-1. This left Arsenal in third place, a point behind second-placed Wolves, who also had two games in hand. Brentford were the surprise leaders at that stage.

The Cup meeting at Molineux was, according to Joy in his history *Forward, Arsenal!*, one of the most exciting ties in which he ever played. Whether or not the pitch had been watered, it was heavy on account of continuous rain in recent days and was a morass in the middle. Allison played a cat-and-mouse game from the dressing room, ignoring the referee's call and obliging Wolves to go out first, leaving them to fret. To deny Cullis his customary dominance in the air, Arsenal had planned to keep the ball on the ground, in spite of the state of the pitch. In the first minute from a low cross by Bastin, Drake escaped the attention of Cullis, took a swing and mishit the ball. Rolling slowly, it crossed the line before an unsighted goalkeeper could react. Kirchen scored a second when shooting from an acute angle. With the score at 2-1, Arsenal hung on and Joy recalled barely having the energy to return to the dressing room. But it was all to no avail. A ragged fifth-round tie against Preston was lost at Highbury, the referee changing his mind after giving a penalty when Drake was brought down, and instead awarding a goal kick.

Following the Wolves Cup tie, Arsenal were in sixth position in the League, six points behind Brentford with two games in hand, and four behind Wolves – a distant prospect until both the others lost momentum. The little-known qualities of Brentford, so often a factor for a rising club, no longer gave them an advantage, and in eight games they took only two points. Arsenal, in contrast, lost only one of the next nine, even though without Kirchen and Drake. By Easter they were top, with six matches remaining, three points in front of Wolves and Preston. The Easter programme should have been a doddle, all three games being in London: Brentford home and away, and Birmingham at home. In the event, it was to be the worst Easter the Club had ever had – two defeats, 2-0 and 3-0 against Brentford and a goalless draw with Birmingham. Result: no goals scored, one point gained.

Nonetheless, Arsenal remained ahead of Preston and Wolves on goal average. Wolves had a game in hand, while Preston – already in the Cup Final against Huddersfield – were well placed to contemplate the Double. Arsenal ended those hopes when winning 3-1 at Preston, whose Cup prospects were threatened by an injury to winghalf Jimmy Milne. (They ultimately won through George Mutch's penalty in the last minute of extra time.)

The League outcome now rested between Wolves and Arsenal, the latter snatching a valuable 1-0 win over Liverpool at Highbury, while Chelsea obligingly grabbed a point at Molineux. Wolves regained the top spot by a point when they won their match in hand against West Bromwich Albion. And so to the last day of the season, with Arsenal home to Bolton, Wolves away to Sunderland. Wolves had to win. If they drew, victory by Arsenal would make them champions on goal average. In the event, Arsenal thrashed Bolton 5-0, while Sunderland somehow found the inspiration to defeat Wolves by the only goal in spite of having a man sent off. No title had been won with the 52 points Arsenal duly recorded since the First Division had been expanded to 22 clubs in 1919.

With more than sufficient first-hand evidence to back his judgment, Allison paid a then-record fee of £14,000 to Wolves for Bryn Jones prior to the start of the 1938/1939 season. This renewed the charge that Arsenal were nothing more than a "Bank of England" team, though analysis shows that Allison spent substantially less in the six years prior to the war than Chapman had in the previous nine. Chapman's expenditure was £101,000 against £40,000 received, an expenditure balance of £61,000. Allison spent £81,000 with a return of £51,000, for a net expenditure of only £30,000. The latter sum was anything but excessive in a six-year period in which Arsenal's gross profits were £136,000.

Sadly, the pressure of becoming the League's most expensive player proved

unbearable for Jones, a shy, retiring Wales international. Jones, a former pit boy from Merthyr Tydfil, was that contradiction, a superstar seeking anonymity, and he never settled into the role for which he had been bought – to be the brains and the mainspring of a new Arsenal. It could perversely be said that for him the calamity of World War II was a blessing in disguise, shelving his responsibilities, though robbing him of the prime years of what should have been an illustrious career. Jones scored in his opening game against Portsmouth and twice more in the next three matches, but he was never comfortable with massive crowds turning out to watch his every move, his every error, and those were his only goals in the League that season. Allison nonetheless stoutly defended his purchase; it had taken Alex James a season to adjust to new surroundings and a new regime, so why should it not be the same for Jones? The fact was they were two different personalities, James being comparatively extrovert and self-assured.

Whatever the merits of Allison's move to enlist Jones, he found himself widely criticised. Rival clubs decried Arsenal as a 'moneybags' team, home supporters expected nothing less than magic from the new incumbent, while Jones's most famous colleague at Highbury was less than enamoured. In his autobiography, Bastin wrote: "I thought at the time this was a bad transfer and events did nothing to alter my view. I'd played against Bryn at club and international level and had ample opportunity to size him up. To my mind, he was essentially an attacking player, who was successful at Wolves largely because the rest of the team were playing well."

In Bastin's opinion, James had the finer football brain. As wing partner to both, Bastin's assessment was valid. As for the sustained hostility of spectators around the country, that was something to which Arsenal had become accustomed. James recalled the animosity at Middlesbrough, for instance, remembering "with feelings of fear and horror" the spectacle of threatening fans pouring on to the field. As George Male would recall: "We were hated all right. They came in their thousands to watch us get hammered – that was the enjoyment they got." If this almost universal view was narrowminded, Everton would provide the antidote. In 1938/1939, Joe Mercer, then a central figure at Goodison, related that they had adopted Arsenal's style – and in so doing won the League.

For Arsenal, all was in the melting pot. Bernard Joy reported that Jones was "quiet, hunched and nervous, unable to join the usual dressing room babble" as they changed for the opening match against Portsmouth. As the season progressed and Jones became less effective, he inadvisedly tended to hold on to the ball more, rather than to let it go and involve his colleagues. It was the

reverse of what was required, and his attempt towards the end of the season to rehabilitate himself through a spell in the reserves also proved fruitless. By winning five of their last six games, Arsenal did climb to fifth in the table, a position satisfactory to most clubs, but not one with Arsenal's expectations. Despite the arrival of Jones, only 55 goals were scored, 20 less than their previous lowest since the offside rule was altered in 1925. Nor was there any consolation in the Cup, where for only the second time in 30 years Arsenal went out in their first match, beaten 2-1 at Chelsea. As Allison surveyed his record over the past four League seasons, it read sixth, third, first and fifth. Times had changed.

Early in the 1939/1940 season, Arsenal's players found their contracts terminated following England's declaration of war on Germany. The League season was closed after only three matches. Nonetheless, in proprietorial fashion under the Football League's regimentation, the players' registrations were retained by their clubs for the duration even though they would be unpaid.

Daily life was in upheaval. Allison became involved in government propaganda, providing the narrative for a short film showing Arsenal scoring a goal. The emphasis was that it was unimportant who scored because, symbolically, the whole team counted. Predictably, Allison would adapt easily to sombre new circumstances. This was a man who, in Arsenal's Plumstead days, had been happy to stand outside the ground, shaking hands with everyone and jollying them into paying their admission money.

Throughout wartime, Allison used a small converted office at Highbury, where Whittaker, who had served in World War I, and Bastin, medically disqualified on account of his deafness, served as air-raid wardens. The ground, taken under government control, suffered several bombs, including 124 incendiaries in one raid, though fortunately, the two double-decker stands remained intact. A barrage balloon was flown, moored on the practice pitch.

In the endlessly disrupted, reduced surroundings of wartime football, Arsenal won regional leagues in 1939/1940, 1941/1942, and 1942/1943. In the last of these years, they also won the League South Cup, mostly augmented by visiting players such as Stanley Matthews, of Stoke, and Ronnie Rooke, of Fulham. Allison's unharmonious relations with Hapgood ended hurtfully for the player after the Club discarded him at a time when he considered he was good to play another year. Drake, serving in the RAF, continued to play for the Gunners until 1945, when he suffered a back injury which terminated his career. In 168 First Division appearances between 1934 and 1939, he had scored 124 goals.

Cup Finals for Arsenal at Wembley, encouraged by the Prime Minister Winston Churchill as good for national morale, were played against Preston in



1941 and Charlton in 1943. The results were all but irrelevant on account of haphazard teams, though in the first of these Tom Finney made his Preston debut. Arsenal's major wartime discovery was Walley Barnes, a Welsh amateur with Portsmouth and then Southampton. Much was to be heard of him after the war.

The dreadful disruption of civilian life robbed many players of their prime years, not least Denis Compton, a talented outside-left who never gained a full cap, but in different circumstances would probably have been a conspicuous international player. The conclusion of the war saw Arsenal meeting, on a November afternoon in 1945, the visiting Moscow Dynamos. For this match, too, Arsenal were enhanced by the presence of Matthews, Stan Mortensen and others as a new era began.

**David Miller**

## PROFILE

# **James's genius**

**Alex James was a midfield playmaker par excellence, whose vision and range of passes made him the perfect embodiment of Herbert Chapman's onfield tactics**

So towering was the reputation established by Herbert Chapman that, at the time and over the subsequent years, it has tended to overshadow the name of his greatest player. If there was to be a bronze bust at Highbury in recognition of the achievement of the 1930s, there is a case for suggesting that the figure to grace the marble entrance hall of the art deco East Stand should have been Alex James. All that Chapman achieved would not have happened without the diminutive, will-o'-the-wisp Scottish creator in midfield. As Bernard Joy, who played alongside him in James's later years, wrote in his biography of the Club: "Alex James was not simply a great player. He made other players great. He provided the spark which ignited the genius in the men around him. He gave unity, purpose and drive to a team, and so lifted the entirety."

In the four years before he signed James, Chapman had transformed a nondescript club into an organisation challenging for top honours, but James was the catalyst that brought Arsenal fame, not just at home but worldwide. Although James was joining, in 1929, an array of already renowned talents, it was almost no exaggeration to assert that over the next six seasons he was Arsenal. Eddie Hapgood, Cliff Bastin, Joe Hulme and others may have been great; James was legendary in the truest sense of the word.

Joy wrote: "My view of Arsenal's debt to [James] echoes that of Tom Whittaker, trainer and then manager over 29 years, who believed Alex did more for Arsenal than any other player. He set his stamp on Arsenal which was to last nearly 30 years; he was the torchbearer of tactics which swept the world."

Sir Tom Finney, then a young boy, used to stand on the terraces at Preston North End, observing James before he moved to London: "So small, so clever, his ball technique was unbelievable. I only went two or three times a year, spending most of my time playing in the street. James was so original, and I was very upset when he was transferred to Arsenal. What was remarkable was that for Preston he played up front, yet at Arsenal was transformed by Herbert Chapman into a creative midfield player."

James, as recorded elsewhere, had stated that it was not his job to chase around "to get the ball back", yet it was Chapman's wish, and vision, that James should become the fulcrum, the playmaker, who would be the mastermind in converting defence instantaneously into attack. But by the turn of the year in

James's first season, the plan was floundering. James was ill at ease; an understanding had not been established with his colleagues and, to the dismay of crowd and critics, there was even talk of relegation. The forward line of Hulme, David Jack, David Halliday or Jack Lambert, James and Charlie Jones, all of them internationals, were proving relative failures.

James, autocratic in his view of his colleagues, had said: "I always try to get somewhere clear of the opposition so that my colleagues are able to pass to me without interference. If they fail to do so, that's their funeral, not mine. I consider I've done my part of the job by getting into position." Part of the problem was that, with less agile tactical minds or such unorthodox methods, his colleagues had not yet begun to "read" James's game. That time was yet to come.

James had been born in the mining village of Mossend, near Glasgow, in 1901, and his first job had been at a local steel mill. Playing for Ashfield, a junior club in Glasgow, he was transferred to Raith Rovers and from there to Preston in 1925. At 5ft 6ins tall but strongly built, he had that priceless quality of almost every great player, a low centre of gravity, providing him with perfect balance and allowing instant changes of direction. He possessed feints, with a foot over the ball or a sway of the hips, that would clear defenders from his path. Like all masters of the ball, he could lure defenders into thinking they could reach the ball and take it from him, only for him to sneak it away and leave them helplessly off balance. Like all supreme players, he could screen the ball from opponents with a twist of his body. This resulted in him being kicked black and blue, yet like George Best he accepted this hammering, often illegal, without retaliation. There was in him an unquenchable free spirit, a determination never to be subdued.

Hapgood, Arsenal's captain, described the James-Bastin wing partnership as "a natural – a tough little Scot, hard as a nut, commercially minded, determined to get much out of football, who had joined Arsenal because it offered the best possibilities of improving his position; the other the son of sturdy West Country folk, quiet, reserved, but born to be great, with the ability to play with the touch of a master".

The achievement of winning the 1930 FA Cup crystallised the essential function that James fulfilled within the team, being on hand to relieve defenders under pressure by making himself available for the short clearance, then transferring the ball, swiftly and tellingly, to one or other of the forwards, notably Hulme or Bastin on the wings. So accurate was his passing that Arsenal could move from penalty area to penalty area in a matter of seconds. By 1930, Arsenal had built a near-impregnable defence and a counter-attacking strategy

centred on James that repeatedly caught the opposition offguard. As Joy recalled, the moves were simple enough but dependent upon James's supreme skill, anticipation, positional sense and passing accuracy. Such was his mastery that Arsenal could afford to play with four attackers, James bringing Bastin and Hulme into play often with long crossfield passes.

Tom Whittaker said of him: "Coupled with his sincerity and his loyalty to all his bosses, he had a trait few of us are blessed with – that is, he had an ice-cold temperament." Part of his acquired character on the field had originated with a caricature by Tom Webster, cartoonist for the Daily Mail, who portrayed a diminutive figure with baggy trousers below his knees. James liked the image and adopted it from then on, looking, with his buttoned-up sleeves, like some Chaplinesque character. Though he may have been calculating in his financial dealings, he could be generosity itself. He gave away both his Cup-winning medals with Arsenal. After victory over Huddersfield in 1930, he sent his medal to Robert Morrison, a friend and former director at Raith Rovers, with a covering note: "No one deserves it more than you, for I can honestly say that there would never have been any Alex James but for old Bob." When Arsenal won again six years later against Sheffield United, James gave his medal to Pat Beasley, who lost his place at Wembley when Ted Drake was passed fit. The FA had refused an additional medal for Beasley, who had played in earlier rounds.

It was, of course, lucky for Arsenal that James ever became available from Preston. It happened because of an incident in October 1928, concerning his availability to play for Scotland against Wales; release in those days was not mandatory. Confronting the Preston manager, he was told that if selected he would be released, yet boardroom minutes revealed: "September 25: James denied permission to play in Scotland v Wales game on October 17." James was infuriated and initially refused to play in the next home match. When nonetheless selected, he gave a display of almost immobile indifference. The directors had called his bluff, he called theirs, and transfer was the inevitable conclusion.

On arrival at Arsenal, James owed a huge debt to Whittaker, but for whom he might never have recovered from the deep-seated injuries that he was carrying. "At first, I used to think he was playing the old soldier," Whittaker recalled. "Although he used to complain of bruising in his legs, I could not find any. But the very dark skin of his shins, contrasting to the colour of the rest of his legs, gave the answer. He had so many deep-seated bruises that the whole of both shins from knee to ankle were almost mahogany in colour, so I set to work to eradicate the damage. Gradually Alex's legs came back to normal. Yet he was such a great-hearted little man that he would play on and on, when other men

would demand a rest owing to the pain."

Arsenal had been able to tempt the commercially-minded genius by arranging employment as a sales consultant at Selfridges, the London department store. It was a bonus for James that his appointments in Oxford Street provided the opportunity to move down the road after closing time to the attractions of Soho.

Indeed, his wizardry was achieved in spite of self-indulgence off the field, and Chapman's tolerance of this. On match days, James would remain in bed until noon, and would disappear into the midst of London's nightlife, returning at all hours and never questioned or challenged by either the manager or his long-suffering wife, Peggy, who once declared: "I don't really care [where he goes] as long as he comes home. If it hadn't been for my tolerance, I suppose the marriage wouldn't have lasted."

James's high-life proclivities were hardly exceptional for a footballer, even if few players then had his available spending money. One who got to know him well was Roy Ullyett, the Daily Express sports cartoonist. "Alex was a wonderful wee man, but not the best of influences," Ullyett revealed in his autobiography *While There's Still Lead in my Pencil*. "Alex introduced me to the nightclub circuit and used regularly to take me to an afternoon drinking haunt in Covent Garden. Invariably he would get legless. This was commonplace on a Thursday, with a match 48 hours away, but on the Saturday he would play a blinder, and I quickly realised that alcohol to Alex was like petrol in his engine."

If Arsenal were the team of the decade, James was the soul of the team. After he retired in June 1937, he became a journalist on the News of the World. He served in the Army in World War II and returned to Arsenal as coach of the junior team in 1949. He died in June 1953, aged 51.

**David Miller**

**Captured on film**



Highbury saw many dramas through the years, but a fictional one filmed shortly before World War II will stand forever as a testament to the famous old stadium

Highbury was always a stage for drama and May 6, 1939 was no exception. It was Arsenal v Brentford, the final game of the final season before World War II brought play to a halt. Footage from the game was used for the match scenes in *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery*, one of the earliest football films which has subsequently become a cult classic. It was directed by Thorold Dickinson, a well-respected filmmaker who became the country's first professor of film, and stars Leslie Banks as the thoroughly camp Inspector Slade. Balancing his comedy was the gravitas of the manager, George Allison, Arsenal's first XI from 1939 and, of course, Highbury itself, one of the film's central characters.

The film now stands as a journey back to a different era in football: a manager with a fat cigar, trainers with smelling salts, half-time cups of tea and some good-natured banter from flat-capped Cockney fans. The storyline of the comedy-thriller pits The Arsenal against The Trojans, who George Allison in his autobiography calls "the crackajack amateur team in the country". During the charity match the Trojans' star striker is poisoned and later dies, and Inspector Slade of Scotland Yard is called in.

There is, of course, plenty of interest for anyone who has made Highbury their Saturday afternoon home. Dickinson crafts the opening shot of Highbury like a landscape picture and holds on the East Stand from the interior of the ground. To the left, a familiar view that hardly changed from 1936: the triangular-roofed Victorian terraces on Gillespie Road in the open corner of the ground. Then, out of the players' tunnel, trot some of Arsenal's most famous names: Eddie Hapgood, George Male, George Swindin, Jack Crayston, Bryn Jones, Ted Drake and Cliff Bastin. The movie provides a great chance for Arsenal fans to see some of the 1937/1938 Championship-winning side in action. We also see the boys training: shooting and playing head tennis on the practice pitch where the executive boxes eventually stood behind the Clock End. In front of the North Bank roof is the old scoreboard, soon, of course, to be destroyed by German bombs.

Several years before the filming began in the summer of 1939, an author, Leonard Gribble, had approached Arsenal Football Club for permission to write a murder mystery that used the actual names of the players and manager. The *Daily Express* soon serialised Gribble's novel. It appealed to a film producer

who contacted Allison to enquire if he and the players would play themselves in the film. Allison had a keen eye for publicity, encouraging his cricketing stars to bat and bowl through the summer for their county sides so as to keep the name of Arsenal Football Club alive during the break from football. Allison also agreed to ad-lib some commentary. It was a role he was made for: he was employed by the BBC for the very same task and had been the first man to commentate on an FA Cup Final. His cut-glass accent was a distinct improvement on the mumbling one-liners by the uncomfortable Tom Whittaker and the players. At half-time it is one-nil to the Arsenal "and that's how we like it", Allison says.

Allison's autobiography provides amusing insights into the filming process. A producer contacted him shortly before the team's departure on a summer tour of Sweden and Denmark. Although filming meant a shorter summer vacation, Allison was offered what he thought was a satisfactory amount for three weeks' work – £500. In those days, contracts were divided between the football season and the off-season, when a player was paid substantially less. The team were offered £50 per week throughout the filming and, as their summer wage from the club was £6, they all readily signed up. When filming continued after the three weeks were up, the players received 10 guineas a day. Allison found that his "contract stipulated so many things that the three weeks developed into a strenuous two to three months. But the experience and novelty were worthwhile, even if it did show me that Mr Bogart doesn't have such an easy time as it appears from a seat in the circle."

Arsenal players attended the opening night on February 17, 1940, but box-office takings were naturally affected by the war.

Despite that, Arsenal fans will always value the movie for its nostalgic look at a classic stadium and stands that have passed into football heritage and folklore – especially now that the famous 1930s Marble Halls and East Stand dressing rooms no longer echo with players' studs or a manager's half-time instructions.

Arsenal are a club that have always maintained the highest standards of surroundings for both players and fans, and as the years pass by at the Ashburton Grove site, the footage in this film will stand as a poignant reminder that it has always been that way at Arsenal Football Club. Dickinson's film is a permanent memorial to the old ground.

**13.**

# **The men in charge**

In 93 years at Highbury, Arsenal had just 14 managers and each of them, whether maverick, genius or simply solid citizen, added to the rich tapestry of a remarkable football club

# Best of the best

Three clubs in particular have distinguished the history of the professional game in England since the turn of the 19th century: Arsenal for the longest period, from the Twenties to the present day (though with a fallow period in the Fifties and Sixties); Manchester United from the time of their emergence under Matt Busby following World War II; and Liverpool, with their overwhelming dominance during the Seventies and Eighties. Liverpool lead the field with their 40 major titles, followed by Manchester United with 31 and Arsenal with 27.

During their 90 years of collective ascendancy, the three clubs have had relatively few managers – 12, seven and 12 respectively. Manchester United's achievements have been, remarkably, primarily under only two managers, Busby and Sir Alex Ferguson, and Liverpool's under three, Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley and Kenny Dalglish. Arsenal have had five leading trophy winners, from Herbert Chapman with five, then Tom Whittaker and Bertie Mee each with three, George Graham with six and Arsène Wenger with seven – thus far.

What is exceptional about Arsenal's place in history is that Chapman and then, more than 60 years later, Wenger literally changed the face of the game with their tactical attitudes. It is one of those oddities, throughout many of Arsenal's illustrious years, that public perception was that the Club earned their glory primarily through defensive efficiency, gaining the tag 'Lucky Arsenal' and being described by critics as boring. Yet under Chapman and then, most brazenly, Wenger the Club have been among the most exciting attacking teams ever witnessed. Of course, the game as a whole has changed. As Jack Crayston, player and then briefly manager following Whittaker, observed archly a few years ago: "In my time players had short hair, long shorts and played in hobnail boots. Now they have long hair, short shorts and play in slippers." Yet there is also the old maxim that there is nothing new in the game, and while so much of Arsenal's reputation may rest on a tradition of great defences, the Club also remained faithful to a policy, from the time of Chapman, of utilising wingers, frequently the greatest crowd pleasers of football.

At the heart of the team created by Chapman was the rearguard of George Male, Herbie Roberts and Eddie Hapgood, rock-solid throughout the triumphant

years from 1933 to 1938; on to the Double-winning side of 1971, and a fortress backline of Pat Rice, Frank McLintock, Peter Simpson and Bob McNab in front of that sterling goalkeeper, Bob Wilson. Two decades on and George Graham was earning the headlines of being boring with probably the greatest back four there has ever been in England: Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould and Nigel Winterburn, in front of another fine goalkeeper in David Seaman. It would be Wenger's great fortune that he inherited this backline, with the additional alternative of Martin Keown, and had the wit and wisdom to renovate and even improve it when winning Arsenal's second Double in 1998.

Competition at the highest level has become ever more intense: while 13 clubs shared the 20 League titles and FA Cup victories in Bertie Mee's time as manager, only four teams won the 18 domestic prizes between 1996 and 2004, Arsenal and Manchester United sharing 15 of those. As for the missing link in the Arsenal trophy cabinet represented by the European Cup, it is ironic that Wenger perhaps needed a stronger streak of that defensive preoccupation which he inherited from Graham.

The 'boring' tag has, however, always been unjust: when Leeds United under Don Revie were champions in 1969 and 1974, their goal aggregates were 66:26 and 66:31. Mee's Double team of 1971 yielded only 29 goals, but John Radford and company scored 72. Nottingham Forest under Brian Clough and Liverpool under Paisley were champions in 1978 and 1979, conceding only 24 and 16 goals respectively. George Graham's championship sides of 1989 and 1991 had aggregates of 73:36 and 74:18, yet there had been no hue and cry that Clough and Paisley were excessively defensive. Peter Withe, John Robertson and the rest scored only 69 goals, but no one dared to call Clough boring.

Arsenal, I suspect, have been victims partially of envy, but also subjectively judged on account of the character of their managers: Chapman for his flamboyance, Mee for his provincial bank-manager demeanour and lack of personal playing experience, Graham for becoming withdrawn and hyper-sensitive.

## **Herbert Chapman**

There are aspects of the revolution brought about by Herbert Chapman that remain enigmatic. First, those who knew him have been of the opinion that he would never have survived in modern times: his autocracy, rigid discipline, unilateral control of the club – effectively taking every decision at every level, remaining behind most days at Highbury until late in the evening – would not

have worked under changes in society that were to take place after World War II. This is not to deny that every great leader has to be a man or woman of their time.

Second is the fact that on three or four occasions Chapman skirted close to the borders of legality with regard to Football League regulations, though he always survived. Third, and most imponderable of all, what might have happened had Arsenal not won the FA Cup in 1930 after five years of relative underachievement, notwithstanding his overhaul of the playing staff and operation of almost every aspect of the Club? Alex James, who had been controversially enticed from Preston North End at the start of the 1929/1930 season when a serious question mark was hanging over his own career, wrote years later: "I often wonder what Chapman would have done had we not won the Cup ... If he did not make good, he was no use to Arsenal and would have to go. They had paid £9,000 for me, but, frankly, if we hadn't won at Wembley, I'm fairly certain I would have been up for sale again."

Not only had Chapman still to confirm his reputation from two League titles with Huddersfield Town – whom Arsenal would now face at Wembley – but public opinion was as yet unconvinced about the change in tactical role devised for James, making him a playmaker rather than a goalscorer as he had been at Preston. In his 31 league and six FA Cup appearances in 1929/1930, when Arsenal finished 14th in the League, he scored only seven times. In the event, a resounding Cup victory over Huddersfield was the catalyst that launched Chapman and his team on the path to greatness, bursting out of the moribund confines of English football, of which the *Lancashire Daily Post* had observed in 1928: "Most clubs go along the old lines, self-satisfied, hoping for the best, but doing little to encourage it, hugging the belief that they are good enough to give the other fellow a licking, but not sufficiently keen to study the way to do it most effectively." Chapman was to change this with a vengeance. From Arsenal's point of view it was not before time.

Following Chapman's arrival in 1925, Arsenal had been more noted for activity off the pitch than on it, Chapman not excluded. He had already survived the controversy of alleged illegal payments while in charge of Leeds City during World War I, as a result of which he was barred from management, but subsequently reinstated in order to join Huddersfield. Questions against him were then raised, at a time when Arsenal's chairman Henry Norris was suspended from all football for alleged inducement to players. But Chapman denied that he had been party to illegal offers to persuade Charles Buchan to leave Sunderland and a prosperous sports shop on Wearside for Highbury in 1925. Conscious of his clouded reputation in this area, Chapman forestalled

investigation into James's transfer by requesting an investigation regarding James's arrival from Preston. To facilitate this move, what Chapman had done, quite legally, was secretly to negotiate a contract for James to make weekly appearances in the promotion of Selfridges, Britain's first large department store: truly the first celebrity sports star.

It was Harry Selfridge, the chairman, who indirectly aided Chapman in converting his playmaker into the most famous Arsenal player of all time, Thierry Henry notwithstanding. Like Chapman, Selfridge was a visionary, and told James: "You have to seek perfection consciously, if you don't, you will go on repeating yourself." It would be the genius of James who pulled together the threads of Chapman's developing team, above all releasing the full potential of the electric Joe Hulme on the right wing and uncanny Cliff Bastin on the left, as devastating a pair of goal-scoring wingers as ever existed. As Bernard Joy, amateur centre-half for both Arsenal and the full England side, and later correspondent of the *Evening Standard*, wrote in his Club history *Forward Arsenal!*: "There were few thrills in football to match that of an Arsenal breakaway goal. The ball would be cleared from defence, then a long pass [from James] in front of Hulme, a burst of 30 yards and an accurate centre volleyed first time by [Jack] Lambert or Bastin. There would be perhaps 10 seconds from one goal-mouth to another."

Following victory in the Cup, Arsenal proceeded to take their first League title with what would become a legendary team. Losing only four games, they scored 127 goals, the bulk of these, 111, coming from four men: Hulme (14) and Bastin (28) on the wings, Lambert (38) and co-striker David Jack (31). Between 1929 and 1935, Bastin would score 116 League goals and Hulme 75, an astonishing average between them of almost a goal a game. Chapman had adapted the roles of almost every player in the side, the function of the wingers now no longer to follow the conventional role, going down the outside of the full-back, but to cut inside at the earliest opportunity with the intention of shooting if possible. The perverse disapproval of critics, that Arsenal were defensive and boring, arose from the fact that the defence, including both wing-halves, would funnel back to create a wall across the front of the penalty area, then counterattacking at electric speed. As Chapman said: "We have ceased to use our wings in the old style – the aim of Hulme and Bastin is to go inside when we attack, but that's also the aim of the wing-halves. This gives us seven men going in on goal. In defence, the team swings the other way, so that we have eight defenders when our goal is challenged. The defence pivots towards the flank of the attack, our opposite back moves across to support the centre-half. It is essential, also, that the two inside-forwards retreat, and it is on this account



that you get what is termed the WM-formation. The two wing-halves are, therefore, the key men, either in defence or attack."

No one else in management at the time even *began* to understand Chapman's tactical thinking, and undoubtedly envy was partly the source of much of the criticism. A negative philosophy has erroneously been attributed to Chapman: that every team begins a match with one point and should hold on to it. His view was, rather, that sound defence must be the basis of successful attack. Between 1930 and 1937, of nearly 700 League goals by Arsenal, fewer than 30 were scored by non-forwards. In this sense, Chapman's football was a long way from the so-called total football of the Seventies onwards, initiated by Holland and Germany, in which midfielders contribute substantially to goal scoring. In terminology, Chapman's formation was 3-4-3, though with Jack playing forward in support of Lambert, it would more properly be termed 3-3-4, which, in fact, was the formation which Tottenham Hotspur, under Bill Nicholson, would employ when achieving the first Double of the 20th century in 1961. Though Chapman was years ahead of his time, in reality 3-4-3 is exactly the same as WM : Male-Roberts-Hapgood at the back, Hulme-Lambert-James up front.

Synonymous with Chapman's tactical development and alignment of players was the evolution of his own position. There was no such function prior to his emergence as 'team manager'. Almost everywhere else the title was "secretary-manager", the incumbent exclusively wearing a suit and tie, leaving training in the hands of the "trainer", who would have the players running round the pitch a few hundred times, while he confined himself to concentrating on possible transfer deals and discussing selection with the directors, who in many instances themselves effectively determined the line-up. Secretary-managers assembled players rather than coached them. They largely had little effect upon their lives, as such, other than whether they were employed or not. Secretary-managers sat behind a desk and agreed wages, which were mostly as low as they could get away with. Chapman, who dealt with every minute detail of the Club down to new light bulbs, brought a revolution off the field as much as on it. True, he was a disciplinarian and a perfectionist, but he had his sensitive side. In a general sense, he defined the Victorian philosophy of the lower middle classes: that of self-improvement alongside aspirations that were cultural and social as much as material. It was said that the happiest day of his life was when his son qualified as a solicitor. It was his foresight that initiated an insurance policy for players, out of their wages, while they were playing, alongside opportunities for house purchase loans from the Club so that they might establish their future security. In his analysis of players prior to transfer, character and background were as paramount as skill. It is symptomatic of his time that a scouting report on one

player, a well-known international at the time, included the observation: "A bit crude when eating." Arsenal players were expected to know how to behave, on and off the field, to be exemplary at all times. In his pursuit of perfection, he could be ruthless. George Hardy, the first-team trainer, was demoted on the spot for usurping Chapman's authority with touchline instructions to players, and Tom Whittaker, the Club physiotherapist, was promoted. Another instance of Chapman's genius came when he told Whittaker, whose playing career had been ended by injury: "I'm going to make this the greatest club in the world, and I'm going to make you the greatest trainer in the game. What do you say to that?" Alongside his perfectionism, and his demand for fair play from his players, Chapman was himself a good sport. When Arsenal memorably fell to Third Division Walsall in the FA Cup in 1933, he unhesitatingly went straight to the Walsall boardroom to say: "Congratulations, your team played magnificently."

His partnership with James, in its way more collaborative and fruitful than those between Busby and George Best, Bill Nicholson and Danny Blanchflower, Don Revie and Billy Bremner, Bob Paisley and Kenny Dalglish, was on a par with Arsène Wenger's with Patrick Vieira and then Thierry Henry, yet more sensational on account of the era during which it occurred. James, wilful and whimsical by turn in his idiosyncratic Scottish way, would recall: "Chapman and I, both obstinate and super-confident in our own abilities, battled all the time. We were always having verbal warfare." The misfortune for English football was that the innovation established by Chapman at Highbury, while leaving a legacy that served Arsenal for so long until it became an impediment, was that it failed, for more than a decade, to inspire other clubs, foreign football meanwhile being busy developing until it had supplanted English supremacy.

As *The Times* obituary observed on Chapman's death: "It remains to be seen whether or not there will be disciples who will carry on his work of popularising football, making it attractive to the shilling-paying public." Chapman himself had said: "Defence has been perfected to a remarkable degree, and I heard it suggested that through its further development football may be brought to a state of stalemate. It will be a sorry reflection on forwards if they have not the intelligence, the inventiveness, to devise means by which they can carry their attack to a successful end." Whatever the fortunes of other clubs, Chapman's comment was not to be fulfilled again at Arsenal until the arrival of a certain Frenchman some 60 years later.

## **Tom Whittaker**

How good a manager was Tom Whittaker? In the opinion of Bernard Joy, had Whittaker not been promoted to assistant manager to George Allison – from physio-trainer – and then manager in the 1946/1947 season immediately after World War II: "Arsenal would have been relegated and might have taken years to regain their place in the game." Under Allison, Chapman's successor and man-about-town, with his entrepreneurial air, Arsenal had adapted poorly to the resumption of the professional programme post-war. Training had become slack, hangers-on appeared in the dressing room, and wives and friends had begun travelling on the team coach to away games. Chapman's aura of excellence had become eroded, and of the first 18 games in the 1946/1947 season, 11 were lost and three drawn. Whittaker brought a halt to the degeneration and began to restore some of the pride.

Allison had been the unpaid managing director since Chapman's death in 1934 and then, relinquishing of necessity the title of director – which was not allowed to be a paid position – had become secretary-manager. With minimum oiling of the wheels he had maintained the momentum of Chapman's great team, completing the trio of Championship wins in 1934/1935, winning the Cup again in 1936 and claiming the League title, for the fifth time, in 1937/1938. When war arrived, that team was over the hill, and though Allison valiantly tried to keep the Club active during wartime, he had neither the energy nor the ability to re-establish a Chapman-style regime after it was over. Though retaining his flair for publicity and public relations, as a former journalist, he was essentially in the oldtime mould of secretary-manager rather than manager-coach. He had dispensed with some of the secretarial responsibilities, appointing young Bob Wall as box-office manager.

Lacking theoretical knowledge of the game, Allison made an ill-judged purchase in 1938 of Bryn Jones, a £14,000 midfielder from Wolverhampton Wanderers and an idol of Wales and the Midlands. The mild-mannered, selfeffacing Jones was no Alex James, and by the time the war ended, his prime had passed. Allison was in trouble. Cliff Bastin was one of those who subscribed to the opinion that he was less than proficient in football expertise. "He would have the name of Arsenal splashed all over the front pages, but he lacked Chapman's gift of getting the best out of his players." The burden on Whittaker would be considerable.

Whittaker was a quiet, complex figure, a former player, and physiotherapist who was brilliant in the dressing room, but less comfortable in the managerial seat. By all accounts he tended to give the players little technical direction, though he extended the career of Joe Mercer when inspirationally signing him

from Everton in late 1946 by restricting his pitch-length surges and turning him into an all-seeing defensive winghalf, while simultaneously curing a prolonged knee and muscle injury. But his aura as manager was one of slight remoteness from the team. He had been an administrative officer in the RAF during wartime and saw his responsibilities more as a general manager of administration than coach. Ken Friar, then a young assistant to Wall who subsequently rose to become secretary then managing director, recalls: "Tom was not intimate, but neither was he dictatorial. While everyone knew he was boss, he was a little bit distant, and spent much of the time in his office."

There were those who said he was weak in his control of men, though Wall defended him. "What he did was to let people think they were getting away with something, whereas in the end they generally did what he wanted them to do." With hindsight that seems something of a backhanded compliment, and from my own distant, youthful recollection of some of his dealings, I would say that he was probably at ease with more established, successful players but not sufficiently tough and demanding at close quarters to maximise the development of newer players. What is unquestionable is his undoubted loyalty to the Club which he served for almost his entire professional life, at one time refusing even to consider an offer to become coach to the Italian national team at the then astronomical salary of £8,000 a year plus bonuses, car, interpreter and luxurious apartment in Rome. Yet whatever his shortcomings in the hot seat might have been in the long term, he rapidly put Arsenal back on track.

A fortnight after the Mercer scoop, he made the astute signing of Fulham's veteran forward Ronnie Rooke, 13 years a professional and no longer able to hold a regular place in the Second Division side. It was a gamble that paid off handsomely. Built like the prow of a battleship at Trafalgar, Rooke was a formidable figure. I remember once playing against him in the twilight of his career when he appeared for Lewes in the Sussex Senior Cup against Eastbourne Town. We were amateurs in the Corinthian League, mostly, and Rooke spent most of the game standing round the edge of the centre circle and shooting from all of 45 yards. The gift that he brought to Arsenal was remarkable: 21 goals in 24 matches to avoid the threat of relegation in 1947, Arsenal finishing 13th, followed by 33 in 42 games the following season when Arsenal recaptured the title. It was an astonishing transformation constructed around two ageing players, Mercer and Rooke, whose careers were thought to be all but over. While Mercer would continue to record further great deeds, Rooke had one more season, hitting 14 goals in 1948/1949 in 22 matches.

Such was Whittaker's regeneration of the team that when they met Chelsea in the third round of the FA Cup in January 1947 – a tie going to two replays,

with Chelsea eventually winning 2-0 at White Hart Lane – a total of 183,135 spectators attended the three matches. Sadly for Rooke, he was outshone by two goals from Tommy Lawton.

Bred under Chapman to recognise the importance of strength on the wings, which Arsenal seriously lacked in 1946/1947, for the start of the Championship-winning season of 1947/1948 Whittaker had secured Don Roper from Southampton, switching Ian McPherson from right to left to accommodate him, until Denis Compton, in spite of an arthritic knee, became available for the second half of the season, scoring six vital goals in 14 games. With Mercer now effective as sweeper in front of the rearguard trio of Laurie Scott-Leslie Compton- Walley Barnes, Arsenal conceded only 32 goals as opposed to 70 the previous season. They were watched by average attendances of 54,982.

The side that took the title in 1948 was the oldest to do so in modern times and relative disappointment the following season was to be expected. Form was disrupted by severe injury to Scott at right-back and to Leslie Compton, and the death of Sir Samuel Hill-Wood, the chairman, early in 1949, deepened the gloom. Fifth position in the League, however, was hardly a disaster and nor was sixth the following season. Though Whittaker was confined by rooted post-war caution in the payment of transfer fees – unable to bid for star players such as Don Revie and the Welsh dragon Trevor Ford when they became available – he was able to acquire Doug Lishman from Walsall as a striking alternative for Reg Lewis, though it was Lewis's three goals that were essential in taking Arsenal to the 1950 FA Cup Final and his two further goals at Wembley that brought victory over Liverpool. In 1950/1951, now partnered up front mainly by Peter Goring, Lishman was a fixture, scoring 16 goals, until breaking his leg against Stoke City on Christmas Day. By the time he returned 17 matches later, hopes of another title had gone, but his 22 goals in 39 matches, alongside Cliff Holton's 19 in 21 games, rewarded Whittaker and, most notably, Joe Mercer, with a second League title in 1952/1953. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Whittaker's reputation as a manager had rested heavily on the shoulders, or rather the bowed legs, of Mercer, who over eight seasons was literally the heart and soul of the Club.

## **Bertie Mee**

"It's no exaggeration," Don Howe has said, "to say that Arsenal's future as a Division One club was in the balance when Bertie Mee became manager. He turned things around." That was in the summer of 1966, set against the

background of national euphoria, England being triumphant in the World Cup. The mood at Highbury was anything but joyous, though, the reign of Billy Wright, former national hero for his leadership of Wolves and England, having ended in unhappy disarray. But the legacy for Wright's successor included Pat Rice, Sammy Nelson, Peter Storey, Peter Simpson, Jon Sammels and John Radford, all of whom had graduated from the youth academy. To cap this, in the spring of 1966, he had signed from Holloway School down the road a promising boy by the name of ... Charlie George. These were the names that – within five years – were to figure in Arsenal's greatest era since the time of Chapman.

Having gambled and failed in their selection of Wright, the board chanced their arm again in reverting to in-house promotion when opting for the publicly unknown Bertie Mee. Though at the time the choice astounded the dressing room almost as much as it did those on the North Bank, it was to prove a profound decision. "The opinion had been taking shape for some while in the boardroom," Ken Friar recalls. "They knew Bertie had the man-management skills, even though it was recognised that he lacked coaching experience." It was in man-management, and delegation, that Mee was to be masterful, his grasp of efficient administration established in his wartime service, his understanding of player psychology gleaned over many years of witnessing players' strengths and frailties in the intimate surroundings of the physiotherapy room. He turned Arsenal around by enlisting the assistance of exceptional coaches – first Dave Sexton and then, when Sexton left to succeed Tommy Docherty as Chelsea manager, one of the outstanding coaches of the second half of the 20th century, Don Howe.

Already goalkeeper-in-waiting as understudy to Jim Furnell was Bob Wilson, another signing of Wright's, who was to become a pillar of the Arsenal establishment. He was witness to Mee's nuts-and-bolts restructuring of the Arsenal edifice, less demonstrative, but as deep-founded as Chapman's 40 years earlier. "A first crucial tactical change," Wilson recalls, "was the switching of Peter Storey from full-back to midfield. Storey would become our Norman Hunter, our 'Chopper' Harris, our Nobby Stiles, a guy who could mix it, with a streak of the assassin in him. Peter was there to help protect the defence. Look at Roy Keane or Patrick Vieira in more recent times, doing the same job. In any era, every successful side has had a midfield collector/destroyer."

Wilson, after an illustrious playing career, did not go into management. Instead he became goalkeeping coach at Highbury and a shrewd assessor of tactics. "It was a further stroke of genius jointly by Mee and Howe to convert Frank McLintock from an almost out-of-control winghalf, impulsive in every respect, into a central defender. Frank was the best captain I ever played under,

the ideal leader. Yet the tactical voice of the team was Bob McNab at left-back [signed by Mee for the 1967/1968 season]. Towards the end of that season I was gaining a regular place and it was Bob who organised the back four when we switched, under Don Howe's direction, from man-to-man to zonal marking. Bob had the eye and the instinct to see that the training practices worked on match day, to make sure, for instance, that Frank did not move too far forward. Bertie's relationship with Dave [Sexton] and then Don was harmonised – Bertie was manager, but in training his wasn't the first word. He had the sense to realise he was not a God-given coach; his strength lay in the discipline of the Club. Don was the master of our tactical organisation as we became increasingly effective during the late Sixties, and people never properly gave him the credit for the way in which we turned defence into attack. He gained the stamp of just being a defensive coach. His reputation was such that even today, 40 years later, people want to hear him lecture. Don could be spit-in-your-face disapproving one moment, and the next lift you to the heights, and we all loved him for it. He was world class."

In what progressively became an unsparingly functional unit, George Graham, signed from Chelsea, became the team's luxury almost, alongside the equally gifted George. Selfpreening on and off the field, in manner, dress and football touch, Graham was nonetheless another shrewd purchase by Mee, having the intellect to dovetail smoothly into the Howe formula. He remembers the time fondly and would attempt to emulate the mood when he became manager 15 years later. "Bertie and Don set professional standards in every way – off the field in timekeeping, dress code, your everyday behaviour. In any walk of life, to be successful there has to be organisation, otherwise there's anarchy, and Bertie and Don emphatically established this. Another aspect of success is job specification, asking people to do what they're capable of doing. Bertie and Don were perfect at this, and the maintenance of this principle, of consistently doing what we were each good at doing, helped to give us the tag of being boring."

Terry Neill, though himself replaced in central defence by Peter Simpson by the end of 1967/1968, also fondly remembers his time within the Mee-Howe revolution. "The initial tactical impact came, of course, from Dave Sexton – very quiet, but one of the great thinkers of the game alongside Ron Greenwood. Dave wrote an individual instruction card for each player, outlining their tactical responsibility and objective, how to pivot with your centreback partner, how to give vocal assistance to adjacent colleagues. Each aspect was vital. Don Howe continued in the same vein. The tactical emphasis was always 'togetherness'. Defending started from the front immediately we lost possession. But when we

had the ball everyone was free to go forward. Don used to say that the entire team was linked by a chain, always linked."

McLintock admits to having almost re-learnt the game under the Mee-Howe regime. "We worked so hard in training, in defence versus attack – first one-against-one on a whole half of the pitch, so exhausting, Don teaching you as a defender not to dive in, to stand up and force the attacker to make his move, and when you failed, then 30 press-ups! You learnt how to push the ball and the opponent away from danger, how to wait for support, playing two-against-two, then four-against-four, then four defenders against eight attackers, with a rope between each defender so that you are always in touch, a similar kind of defence mechanism to the Italians. George [Graham] did exactly the same when he became manager. When you look at contemporary defences, there's no comparison now with what we were doing then, now everybody wants to be on the ball. Whether it's in the Champions League or the World Cup, defences are not so much a unit as they were in the Seventies and Eighties. Nowadays, when someone gets a run at the defence, never mind which league, and gains four or five yards on the opposition, they then find it very difficult to defend. I don't think there's the same organisation that in our time was called boring."

The combined virtues of Mee and Howe carried a refurbished Arsenal to League Cup finals in 1968 and 1969, Fairs Cup victory in 1970, League and Cup Double in 1971 and another FA Cup Final in 1972. So where stands Mee in the history of English management? To achieve the Double as he did with a team lacking what might be considered world-class players was indeed an historic triumph: a team that exceeded the sum of its parts. Mee was conscious of his own technical limitations, and his wisdom in appointing people who could do the things he could not, his marshalling of forces – both playing and coaching – was truly exceptional.

It was expected, in the euphoric aftermath of the Double, that his squad would move from strength to strength, but the departure of Howe for his native West Bromwich Albion, driven by the ambition to be master of his own ship, was the start of a decline. This was hastened by the fact that certain players, who had achieved glory beyond anything their manager had ever known as a player, now lost some of their awe in the face of his disciplinary regime, and were less willing to play for him within that unwritten code of team spirit. It is significant that so many of the Double team – McIntock, George, McNab, Storey – had disruptive confrontations and/or departed. Mee's loss of authority inside the camp railings was almost as swift as his establishment of command had been at the start.

As Bertie Mee's navigation wandered increasingly off the charts – from



1973-76 they finished 10th, 16th and 17th in the League, despite signing Everton's World Cup firebrand star Alan Ball – that chronic boardroom malaise of "unease", prevalent at every club, even the austere portals of Highbury, resurfaced. When it became known that Miljan Miljanic, the renowned Yugoslav coach at that time in charge of Real Madrid, might be available, gentlemanly Denis Hill-Wood braced himself for attempting yet another gamble. For a variety of reasons the move fell flat, and after a less than dignified delay, Terry Neill, former central defender, was poached from rivals Tottenham Hotspur. Neill's reign, blessed with a host of skilful players and having the distinction of three consecutive FA Cup finals – the first and third lost and the middle one, against Manchester United, witnessing one of the most exhilarating climaxes ever seen at Wembley – ultimately was one of frustration rather than fulfilment.

In a way, it was the reverse of Mee's period: the whole was less than the sum of the parts. The responsibility for the shortfall should not, in my opinion, wholly be laid at the door of the whimsical Neill, whose dedication to the task was no less fulsome than any of his predecessors. League positions between 1976 and 1983 of 8th, 5th, 7th, 4th, 3rd, 5th, 10th and 6th would have been good enough for most other clubs. Beginning with Malcolm Macdonald's injury, prospects of team glory also foundered on the increasing attraction of the European stage for British players. Liam Brady, the Irish playmaker to be spoken of in the same breath as Alex James, departed for Juventus after the Cup final defeat by West Ham in 1980; a year later Frank Stapleton exploited his freedom of contract to join Manchester United. When, additionally, Charlie Nicholas, a wonderfully gifted Scot but deficient in life-management, under-performed, Neill found the wheels of his chariot falling off.

"These were shifting times in the game, which was itself evolving," Neill reflects. "Ajax had shown us the craft of total football, and we tried so hard at Highbury to encourage the young David O'Leary in central defence to break out, to become something of a Franz Beckenbauer or a Rudi Krol [Ajax captain]. But O'Leary was never really happy with this, even though he had a lot of pace. We did a lot of work on his partnership with Willie Young, who I signed having brought him to Tottenham Hotspur. Willie was strong in the air, and O'Leary played off him, but still would not liberate himself. Liam was inexperienced at the start, but I was able to build a great left-side triangle with him, Sammy Nelson at left-back and Graham Rix. With David Price working up and down on the right flank, we had our moments, but the losses of Brady and Stapleton left us with an impossible task, and morale dipped. I have to admit that the failure early on to get the best out of Alan Hudson, potentially so talented in midfield, and the career-ending injury to Macdonald after the first three seasons were

grave disappointments."

After Neill departed, Don Howe finally realised his ambition of being No 1 at Highbury, but in his two years back at the Club he revered, he twice finished a respectable but unimpressive seventh behind Everton and then Liverpool. With strikers as able as Paul Mariner and Tony Woodcock, and Nicholas lurking in reserve, plus a midfield including Rix, David Rocastle, Steve Williams and Paul Davis and a back line variously including Viv Anderson, O'Leary, Martin Keown and Kenny Sansom, these were returns unworthy of a coach of his reputation. It could not be said to have been a surprise when Arsenal made their move to hire the former midfield fulcrum of their Double team, George Graham, now making a name for himself in charge of Millwall.

To understand Graham it is necessary to know his background. He was born in 1944 in the Lanarkshire pit-village of Bargeddie, the seventh child of Robert and Janet. But his father died of tuberculosis only three weeks after his birth and his widowed mother had, as they say, barely a penny to bless herself. With a meagre pension she was reduced to potato-picking with her bare hands, adroitly purloining the odd basketful, having tossed them over a hedge during work and collecting them later in George's pram, under cover of a blanket. Potato soup was the staple diet. Poverty was a formative part of George's upbringing. If the abrupt end of his managerial career at Highbury was because of him giving in to the temptation of illegal payments, it was possible to have a degree of sympathy with a man bred to protect himself against hardship.

Not that Graham was by then hard-up: his post was highly rewarded, the more so after becoming the then-biggest trophy winner in Arsenal's history with six. His self-acknowledged moral frailty should be considered separately from our judgment of the outstandingly durable Arsenal teams he established. Beyond Highbury, they were not always the flavour of the month on account of their defensive predictability, but Graham's success led him to become only the sixth individual in a quarter of a century to be granted the Freedom of the Borough of Islington.

## **George Graham**

How did Graham ultimately get it so wrong when his career had been a catalogue of so much that he got right? People are driven by the forces of instinct, of education and experience, and in these Graham found a conflict: between those of a fine, naturally creative player, and of childhood hardship. Somewhere along the undefined path by which players undergo the

metamorphosis into managers, Graham changed from carefree, relaxed personality known to his colleagues as 'Stroller', into a sharper, more calculating and withdrawn figure, hyper-sensitive to criticism.

On criticism of Arsenal by the respected Trevor Brooking, he asserted: "Brooking doesn't know what the winning mentality is about. He doesn't know what it takes to win a Championship, he was never in a team that won it. I won it as a player and manager. I know what it takes."

Graham also revealed an increasing preference for the more physical type of player, and his reluctance to use Anders Limpar – a flowing Swedish winger who was absent from all 17 matches when Arsenal won both domestic cups in 1993 – dismayed the Club's more discerning supporters. Discussing the kind of midfield qualities he admires, Graham praises the likes of Graeme Souness, Steve McMahon, David Batty and Paul Ince, all players noted for an expedient streak. "We're direct," he would claim, as though that were sufficient virtue, as though he had forgotten his own artistic contributions with Aston Villa, Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester United. The insecurity of his childhood he wore as a badge, claiming that those Scottish managers such as he and Alex Ferguson were successful "because we're all working-class lads, which toughens you up for the real world", a world in which, to quote Danny Blanchflower, "you have to get your retaliation in first". It was all a far cry from King's Road in the Sixties, when mini-skirted dolly birds fell at his feet, forming a "Gorgeous George" fan club, and doing their best to distract him from football.

Indeed so alert was Graham to the virtues of Bertie Mee's regime that he initially did much to re-establish them on arrival as manager, and was responsible for the creation of defensive efficiency surpassing even that of the Double era. In the 1988/1989 and 1990/1991 seasons, when twice capturing the League title, the back line of Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Steve Bould/ David O'Leary and Nigel Winterburn conceded respectively 38 and then a mere 18 goals. Only once during his management were more than 40 goals conceded in a League season. Bob Wilson reflects: "It was one of the greatest defensive set-ups there's ever been, and only one of the players, Adams, was home-grown. The efficiency was created by George in training, often with the ball, often without it, morning and afternoon, until the players knew by instinct precisely where they were on the field in relation to the others. But it only became instinctive by the drilling, day in, day out." And Terry Neill observes: "When you don't concede goals, you've always a chance. With Graham's repetitions on drills, the defence could have played in the dark, they were so efficient. But more than that, they were intelligent. And even with talented players, discipline still applies."

Dixon, commenting in David Cannon's *Arsenal in the Blood*, said: "I learned

so much from George. We were together for 10 years. I was a young, naïve, bombing full-back when I came, and I like to think I kept some of those qualities but also improved myself on the defensive side of the full-back's responsibilities." Alan Smith, an adroit striker bought from Leicester City, who scored more than 100 goals for Arsenal, also talked to Cannon: "[Graham] was a good organiser, knew what he wanted of each player, knew what you could do, what your peak was, and he would demand that from you every week. Even in training, he expected a standard, he had organisational flair and motivational skills. He was excellent at putting things right at halftime. He only left out Anders Limpar when he wasn't playing well. Anders was brilliant in his first season, but subsequently was very patchy ... we eventually stopped becoming a threat in the League ... I think you should buy players after you have had success. When we first won the League in '89, George bought David Seaman and Limpar, and we won again, but he didn't buy anyone except [Ian] Wright after that. I think that's where he went wrong ... They say you should either change the manager or the playing staff. Neither happened, and he got stale."

Looking back on his Highbury days, Graham is unrepentant as to his tactics. "Everyone associates my team with the tag 'boring', but people first begin to like you when you win, and only after that do they want you to play with a bit of panache, a bit of style. So my role was to get the team organised, first, into a winning shape. It's no secret that the majority of great teams are built fundamentally on defence, and part of this comes from the protection of the back line by the midfield. Building from the back gives the whole team the confidence that they're not a pushover. And remember, I built Arsenal virtually on a shoestring. We had few world-class players, other than Tony Adams. The club was tight-fisted on transfer fees, which is probably why I was, initially, so popular!" Accepting the post on a three-year contract at a modest £60,000 a year, Graham was shocked to discover that a dozen or so of the players were out of contract, and set about correcting that. With Rocastle, he was "prepared to lock the door so that he could not leave until he signed".

Most critics would say that Graham's peak came with the winning of his first League title, with the unforgettable victory at Anfield in the final game of 1989. Smith and, in the last seconds, Michael Thomas, scored the goals that rendered Highbury supporters even more ecstatic than when Spurs had been defeated at White Hart Lane all those years ago. The bookmakers' odds of Arsenal winning by two goals had been 16-1. "It was the most vital team-talk I'd given in my fairly short managerial career. Everything I said and did in the build-up to the game was designed to take the pressure off my players. Our training was much more relaxed than usual, and I encouraged a lighthearted, jokey climate far

removed from the usual seriousness."

Arsenal repeated the victory in 1991, and as Graham wrote in his autobiography *The Glory and the Grief*: "Our second Championship in three years lacked the extraordinary lastlap drama of the first, yet when historians look back they will be surprised by what we achieved. We lost only one [League] match and were within shooting distance of the Double, until falling to Spurs in the Cup semi-final. We kept an astonishing 24 clean sheets." Yet the public were growing tired of some of Arsenal's negative tactics under Graham, not least in their 1992/1993 domestic cup double over Sheffield Wednesday. At the start of the 1993/1994 season, Graham had admitted: "The fans keep on at me about a midfield player, but they're telling me nothing I don't know already. Every paper, every radio station, every TV network is saying I need to buy a midfield player. I had a T-shirt made which said 'I'm Trying to Buy a Midfield Player'."

In the event, Arsenal silenced the criticism for a while with their European Cup Winners' Cup victory over Parma. By the time Arsenal came to defend, and lose, their cup in the following year's final against Real Zaragoza, Graham's roof had fallen in. He was dismissed for accepting a bonus – belatedly paid back into the Club accounts – given to him by Norwegian agent Rune Hauge and relating to certain transfer deals but which blatantly belonged properly to the Club. Graham would admit haltingly: "It is no defence, but I am sure that few people could have resisted accepting the money ... I'm as weak as the next man when it comes to life's temptations. I can see that greed got the better of me."

For a man of intelligence it was nonetheless a blunder beyond explanation that he would eternally regret. Whatever Arsenal might think of the fact that during his reign Graham had generated about £35 million for the Club, which had been in debt when he took charge, the board had had no option but to terminate his employment. It was the saddest of occasions for all concerned.

Arsenal concluded the 1994/1995 season under the temporary management of Stewart Houston, and for the next season and a half were under Bruce Rioch, a notable Scotland midfielder who had been making his mark as manager with Bolton Wanderers. His tenure would not be without success: fifth in the League and a League Cup semi-final appearance. More significantly, his reign saw the arrival of Dennis Bergkamp, a Dutch international of exceptional class who was to become one of the most popular players in the Club's history. Bergkamp recalled, in David Cannon's history: "[Rioch] was the typical England manager with a lot of spirit in training, and off the pitch he was very friendly. He taught me a lot about English football."

Bob Wilson was also enthusiastic about Rioch's brief reign. "He tried to establish good habits. He was a huge family man; if a player had a problem at

home, he'd say 'you get off home, son, your family comes first'. I liked that. He had a brusque side to him, he could put people down a bit, but the great thing was that he wanted to do it his way. Everything I ever saw Bruce do in training was to play the game the beautiful way. He didn't want the ball hoofed."

## Arsène Wenger

Without Bruce Rioch's knowledge, however, negotiations were already under way to appoint Wenger, then working with Grampus 8 in Japan, though he refused to arrive until he had completed his contract in the early autumn of 1996. It would not be long before the dictums of this quiet but passionate French economics graduate, who spoke five languages, would start to infect everyone at Highbury. Wenger, who had been manager of Monaco when they were champions of France, was an idealist – not only in the way he wished his own team to play, but also with regard to the competition. "It's important that the best team wins the Championship," he said early in his second season, "and if they're the best team we shouldn't want them not to win it just because it's Manchester United."

In every stance, he was considered and rational. "When you're a manager, you can only be efficient if you respect your own view of football. I just wanted to do things my way, but keep their strong points [as well as] try to keep my own feeling [for the game]. You must be just a little bit lucky when you change things, because you need to be successful. In a big club like this, you must be successful, because there's always a big force to push you back to do things like they did before. So the change must be slow." And: "When you change more than three players in a team, you always take a technical risk because you change the deep balance of the team, mentally and technically ... when you take more than three new players you always have a problem of unbalancing the team, of creating a new balance." In Myles Palmer's perceptive biography, *The Professor*, Wenger said: "When you love the game, that's what first brings players to football. When you're a professional, sometimes because of that it becomes too much like work, you lose a bit of appetite, and when you lose that, you're a little bit less good. Everybody always says 'You have to win'. Of course we know that. But it's not because you know that you have to win, that you win; it's best first of all to love what you do. And if you want to love what you do, it must not be compulsory, it must be something that you want to achieve and that you enjoy."

Bob Wilson observed, in *Arsenal in the Blood*, that first and foremost

Wenger "is truly a really nice man. He's studied both the art and the history of football, he's studied nutrition, diet and what makes an athlete, but the art of what he's done is introducing those in spite of his very ordinary track record as a player. And convincing the squad, not just young kids, but half-a-dozen in the Arsenal team who are over 30. You will never, ever have Wenger hitting aimless long balls. He would never allow it. I see it day after day, the way he drills them, it's pass, pass, pass. With George Graham it wasn't always pretty, not like now when you sit thinking this is a joy to watch." Dennis Bergkamp adds his tribute: "He's very calm, very focused on rest and keeping the team ready for the next game. He's intelligent, good with words, not the type of manager who raves and rants at half-time. Every manager will get mad at times, but he does it in his own way. And you take it, because when a calm person gets mad, you really feel it."

Tony Adams was initially less than impressed, never mind that Wenger immediately confirmed Pat Rice, the caretaker manager, as his assistant, a position the former full-back holds to this day. There was scepticism in the dressing room and Wenger's studious manner quickly earned him the nickname 'Clouseau'. When early on he changed the tactics at half-time away to Borussia Mönchengladbach in the UEFA Cup and Arsenal went on to lose the tie, Adams was angry, wondering "what does this Frenchman know about football? He wears glasses and looks more like a schoolteacher."

Yet within days, Adams began to fall under the spell that would transform his and Arsenal's fortunes. "I've come to like him a great deal: he is a thinker, a listener, and he genuinely cares about the welfare of the players. He knows how to get them into the best working order. The training is conducted with a stopwatch, often only 45 minutes. Older players in particular see the value; it extends their careers. He is a good judge of character, but no shouter and bawler. His team-talks are minimalist in both instruction and motivation. He likes to make observations rather than give orders. He expects them to know their job. He likes to let them go, to have the freedom to perform."

All this is the product of Wenger's development when young. Rather than spend his holidays at Club Med, like most French professionals, he went to Cambridge, hired a bike and enrolled on a three-week English course. After coaching at Cannes then Nancy, he won the championship at Monaco in his first season, with a team including Glenn Hoddle and Mark Hateley. As Hateley recalled: "He was the most intense man I ever played for."

The revolution at Highbury was swift indeed, with Arsenal recapturing the League title in only Wenger's second season, 1997/1998. Joy was doubled by capturing the FA Cup, defeating Newcastle 2-0, for the second League and Cup Double in Arsenal's history. Though Dixon was in and out of the team through

injury, replaced by either of two newcomers, Gilles Grimandi or Remi Garde, Winterburn at left-back played in all but two matches, Adams and Bould in two-thirds of the fixtures when not replaced by Keown. The old guard was holding firm, while Wenger's spectacular acquisitions of Frenchmen Emmanuel Petit and Patrick Vieira produced the anchor of midfield. The attack remained less than overpowering, however, Bergkamp being the leading scorer with 16 and Marc Overmars, another thrilling new Dutch arrival, and Ian Wright scoring 12 and 11 respectively. Wenger was careful not to be too euphoric. "My first thought afterwards was about the Champions League," he reflected. "I know I must keep people happy and that means taking things on another step – winning the Championship again, and the Champions League, an even higher challenge. You must switch that quickly. It's why this job drives you slowly crazy. You never have time to enjoy the present." He admitted that the Club needed a bigger squad to be really competitive, to be able to put out a strong side twice a week.

The following season, 1998/1999, Arsenal would finish a point behind Manchester United in second place, despite the always unpredictable Nicolas Anelka striking 17 goals in his 34 League appearances. An exciting arrival from Italy was that of Nwankwo Kanu, a loping Nigerian balljuggler, who said: "Joining Arsenal was one of the best moves of my career. They have allowed me to play. By the time next season starts, I'll be completely fit for the first time in years." Wenger observed that almost every time Kanu came on, he changed the game. However, one unattractive aspect of the season was the rising number of dismissals: Petit three times, Keown twice and a number of others. Wenger appeared to have an equivocal view of the rough side of some of his players, often archly professing not to have seen the incident. It was an element that would discolour some of the glory that the Frenchman brought to the Club. Wenger also experienced the start of a string of disappointments in the Champions League – in which Arsenal would lose some of the psychological advantage by playing all their home ties at Wembley for its greater attendance capacity. An unwelcome statistic was that, over seven seasons, Arsenal were to lose a large number of European ties. It was to remain a puzzling anomaly for some great teams.

The 1999/2000 season saw the departure of Anelka and the arrival of the gifted Thierry Henry, who would become a jewel without equal. Yet again, though, Arsenal would be outdone by Manchester United, finishing 18 points behind them in second place, never mind Henry's 17 goals in 31 matches. Eliminated from the Champions League in the first phase, losing at home to both Barcelona and Fiorentina, then going on to reach the UEFA Cup Final only to lose on penalties to Galatasaray, it was a season that should have brought



satisfaction rather than the ultimate sense of frustration, though the season ticket holders were intermittently as much entertained by the elusive Croatian Davor Sukor as by the wiles of Henry.

On to 2000/2001, and another second place behind Manchester United in the title race, the side further decorated by the arrival of another definitive Wenger player, Robert Pires, who complemented the varied movement of Henry (who scored another 17 goals in 35 Premiership matches). The rivalry between London and Manchester was intense, but Highbury disappointment was deepened by throwing away the FA Cup Final in the last minutes, having outplayed Liverpool, and by surrendering to Valencia on away goals in the Champions League quarter-final. Good news came with confirmation of the development of a new 60,000-seat stadium down the road; bad news the repeated sending-off of the tenacious Vieira, an element that Wenger seemed not to be able to control.

Vieira was, of course, as much the soul of Wenger's teams as Henry, a player of awesome physical power as well as technical refinement. Given his qualities, together with the arrival at centre-back of Sol Campbell as partner for Adams and Keown, it was surprising that Wenger's "beautiful" football continued to stumble in Europe. In the second phase of the Champions League in 2001/2002, they lost home and away to Deportivo La Coruña and away to Juventus, never mind celebrating Wenger's second domestic Premiership and FA Cup Double as they comfortably beat Chelsea in the FA Cup Final. Vieira was in supreme form, while Henry struck 24 goals in the League; the contrast between domestic and European performance remained puzzling. Wenger told *L'Equipe*, the French sports daily: "I can't imagine finishing my life without winning the European Cup." One of his problems, as ever for English teams with the inescapable importance and attention devoted to the FA Cup, was fixture congestion. When playing Deportivo at home in March, Arsenal had faced Newcastle United away in the FA Cup sixth round three days earlier, while the Spanish side had been able to rest eight players.

The magic of Henry continued in 2002/2003, with 24 goals when appearing in all but one Premiership fixture, and the midfield was hugely enhanced by Wenger's signing of Gilberto, the Brazilian fulcrum in the winning of the 2002 World Cup. But Arsenal again had to cede the title to Manchester United, by a margin of five points, despite scoring 11 more goals than their rivals. Again, the Champions League drifted away from them, however, as they played out four consecutive draws – against Valencia, Ajax (twice) and Roma before a 2-1 defeat in Valencia ended their interest in the competition. Compensation for Wenger's men came in the shape of a third FA Cup triumph, and in spite of some

uncertainty in the centre of defence, Arsenal were poised for an extraordinary achievement the following season when recapturing the Premiership title without a single defeat. That unique modern achievement was as much a reflection of the sustained co-ordination of the team instilled by this unusual Frenchman as of the abilities of the players, who now included Jens Lehmann in goal in place of a fading David Seaman.

It was characteristic of the manager that one evening when vice-chairman David Dein called at Wenger's neighbouring house in Totteridge to invite his manager to join him for dinner, he found Wenger busy studying a video on Celta Vigo, their Champions League opponents three days later. Dein was not allowed to speak for the next hour and a half. Yet, perversely, Arsenal would founder once more in the Champions League, losing at home to Chelsea in the quarterfinal second leg just three days after going out of the FA Cup in a Villa Park semi-final against Manchester United. A possible Treble vanished within days. Nonetheless, with only one change in the back-five over the remaining five weeks of the season – Gaël Clichy replacing Ashley Cole at left-back against Spurs on April 25 – Arsenal bounced back to record four wins and four draws in their final eight league games, to establish another place in history.

In a strange, contradictory way, Wenger now insisted he would not swap the unbeaten League season even for winning the Champions League. "A team wins that every year," he said. "It's not every year a team achieves this. How can you do again what we have done? I don't want to take anything away from the Champions League, but to go unbeaten, in a championship of the type the English tournament is now, is unbelievable. People ridiculed me when I said last year that we could go a season without losing. I was just ahead of my time. No one even spoke about us as favourites at the start of the season. Chelsea had made big buys and Manchester United had strengthened their team. But I knew we had a great spirit. We don't want to make an obsession of winning the Champions League, because the more you do, the less likely you are to win it. I hope the players don't get any sort of mental block. The important thing is to be doing well in your home championship, and then form in the Champions League will follow. It's vital to keep the unbeaten run going, as it would reflect how great this team has been this season. What makes me happy is that everyone acknowledges that they have enjoyed watching us, that we have also won. You can do both. It is dangerous for football if people believe you have to play boring football to win."

Wenger's comments might seem, with hindsight, to be over the top. Although it is true that even the great teams of the past – Tottenham Hotspur's Double winners, Don Revie's imperious Leeds United sides, Liverpool's

masterful formations in the Seventies and Eighties – had not gone a season unbeaten, the reality was that only Chelsea and Manchester United had offered serious challenge. The run continued for another nine League matches in 2004/2005, until Arsenal finally went down 2-0 at Old Trafford, but once more they would be runners-up in the League, this time to Chelsea, and though they would again win the FA Cup, pipping Manchester United on penalties, defeat to Bayern Munich ended their European hopes.

Uncharacteristically, Wenger was ill at ease in the aftermath. Why had Arsenal failed to progress beyond the quarter-finals in seven campaigns, he was asked? "It is too early to start thinking about that." Pressed on the point, he admitted: "I don't know, we are not the only team who have never won the European Cup, and tonight we played against a team who've won it four or five times. I always question my own ability, but it's difficult to say what the answer is. Now certainly isn't the time to be criticising my players". Yet again Wenger was proved right when he took his young team all the way to the Champions League Final in Paris in 2005/2006.

Frank McLintock, dispassionately viewing Arsenal's situation, reflected: "There's not as much emphasis these days on defence, even though everyone knows what they should do. There's not too much coaching, I suspect, in this aspect of the game, so as not to become robotic, to allow more imagination. I don't wholly agree with this. The contemporary emphasis is strictly on passing, and even in the World Cup in 2006, in many teams there was no sign of defensive organisation. For a side to succeed at European level you cannot allow any room for opposing strikers. Look at the way the Italians play the game, whether or not they're successful."

Terry Neill, serious admirer of all that Wenger has done for Arsenal, concedes that there have been shortcomings in the European arena. "It's a difficult mindset [between defence and wishing to carry the game forward]. In Europe, you need a lot more patience. Arsène has believed he could take his attacking game anywhere. Has he concentrated too much on the Premier League? It's hard to say, but maybe now, with the exciting move to Emirates Stadium, we will find that the penny has dropped, that there has to be a stronger emphasis on defensive aspects. Arsène has given Arsenal a great platform with his love of fluid football and his thirst for quick players, but ultimately I think it comes down to the performance of the central defence."

Would the acquisition of William Gallas from Chelsea prove to be the answer? George Graham believes Arsenal were badly in need of a new centre-half: "Arsenal got found out in Europe in defence. On the one hand, the football they were playing in 2003/2004 was unbelievable, yet when they got into Europe

they didn't perform. Why? They were littered with world-class players – Henry, Pires, Freddie Ljungberg. How was it not happening? Why did no one at Highbury come up with a reason? To be honest, I think it was a combination of both defence and tactics. Arsène thought he could repeat what they did in the Premiership, but defences in Europe are far superior to those at home, and Arsenal couldn't figure out why they were both conceding goals and themselves not scoring. You've got to defend as a team. Arsène believes there's only one way to play, and that's going forward. That has brought results at home. But to defend, the midfield has got to be good at everything, to win the ball, to be the engine of the team. That's why I don't think I, as a player, would have got into contemporary teams. You cannot have two men going forward from midfield. You've got to have balance."

## Conclusion

If Wenger and, 70 years earlier, Chapman are agreed to be the two most outstanding managers in Arsenal's history, there is no doubt in my mind that Wenger is the finer of the two. There are those, including that veteran observer of the game, Brian Glanville of *The Sunday Times*, who place Chapman first, but that judgment seems to me to take insufficient account of the level of opposition faced by Wenger's teams at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Chapman was equally exceptional with his innovative ideas, though the truth is that, in the early years of the 20th century, coaching as a concept hardly existed, so Chapman's originality brought an instant advantage. As so much of the game throughout the English First Division was founded on dogma, habit and tradition, it was not that difficult to introduce fresh thinking. It simply required nerve. Thereby Chapman transformed attitudes in the space of a dozen years, even if the majority of other clubs were slow to assimilate and adapt to his tactical thinking. If the football world envied Arsenal's success, those in England were slow to respond.

For Wenger, the challenge was arguably many times more complex. The coaching and establishment of defensive strategies was entrenched throughout the professional game, and this mild-mannered Frenchman, outwardly demure but passionate at heart, harboured an ambition to buck the trend: to play attractive football and still win. Many professionals would have said he had no chance, that he was daydreaming, that his teams would be too vulnerable to counter-attack. If this proved to be so in European competition during his early years at Highbury, his players, and opponents throughout the Premiership

quickly realised that here was a revolutionary to be taken seriously. The flow of trophies that he has brought to the Club were a contradiction of economic fact: that with attendances below 40,000, Arsenal could not be expected to compete with Manchester United and, subsequently, Chelsea, in the race to attract and sign the world's leading players. That Wenger should succeed in his ambition to win with distinction was a truly extraordinary achievement. His stipulation that play must be not merely beautiful, but effective, was an exact echo of Chapman's words: "I want the best possible football, but it must be purposeful, it must be effective." There was, too, a similarity in style, with the use of goal-scoring players on the flanks, the likes of Ljungberg and Pires, even if there was no conventional central striker, Bergkamp and then Henry being more flexible in their roles than Jack Lambert, David Jack or Ted Drake were in the Thirties.

Though critics might seize on Wenger's lack of success in Europe, to his credit must be added the factor of harnessing, within an intensely commercial era, the loyalties and genuine love of the game among players who are encouraged by agents always to be looking for the main chance. It has been far harder to create a sense of loyalty and team spirit than it ever was for Chapman, or Bertie Mee.

**David Miller**

**14.**

# **Total teamwork**

Staff at Arsenal FC have one goal, to bring success to the Club. David Rocastle, the fans' favourite who tragically died prematurely, was a product of that search for excellence

## INTERVIEW



# **The young ones**

**With a scouting network that is second to none and a coaching system designed to encourage players in every age group to play the Arsenal way, the future looks bright**

During Arsène Wenger's reign, Arsenal's youth development policy has come in for its fair share of attention, partly because it has been highly successful and partly because its success has seen very few English players graduating through the ranks. Critics have asked why the Club struggles to produce a home-grown player – and by that they mean a player from these isles – who is good enough for the first team?

When Wenger became the first manager in English football history to name an entirely foreign squad for the match against Crystal Palace on February 14, 2005, he caused a bit of a stir. Valentine's Day that year didn't elicit many romantic sentiments from those who believe English teams should retain at least the semblance of an English core.

Ramifications for the national side were also fervently discussed. How could England move forward with any kind of success when their league was jam-packed with foreigners, when players from Europe, South America and Africa all seemed to be leapfrogging the local talent? When it came to Arsenal's selection policy, everyone appeared to have an opinion.

In response to the furore, a bemused Wenger has always maintained the same line. "I don't look at the passports of people," he insists. "I look at their quality and attitude."

And therein lies the crux of the challenge for the Club's youth development staff. In his time at Arsenal, Wenger has raised standards to an unprecedented height. These days, you don't just have to be good to make the grade, you have to be special. It takes a rare cocktail indeed to carve out a niche in Wenger's first XI: strength, pace, vision, technique and intelligence, plus the right personality to harness these attributes. You don't bump into that kind of blend every day in the high street. You won't find it clogging up the parks and pitches of every London borough. That is why Arsenal are forced to look abroad: the pool of talent in this country simply isn't deep enough to satisfy Wenger's demands.

In reality, it never has been. Had Wenger pitched up at Highbury, say, 30 years ago, he might have found, for various social reasons, a bigger pool to choose from, but it still wouldn't have catered for his specific needs. To make the task even harder, domestic scouting nets have been significantly restricted in recent times. In the days before the development of academies, the system

worked like this: clubs could look all over the country for promising kids, tie them up on schoolboy forms and hold training sessions regionally before bringing them into the apprenticeship system (later to become the Youth Training Scheme) from the age of 16.

Yet when the Charter for Quality was drawn up in 1997 with the aim of devising a better way forward for the coaching, development and education of children, it was decided that a boy must live within a certain radius of their prospective club. That way, the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal couldn't simply snap up all the country's best talent. A degree of equality was introduced, which allowed smaller clubs a fairer crack of the whip. As things stand now, children up to the age of 12 who are signed to a club's academy must live within an hour's travelling distance of that academy's official address (which is Emirates Stadium for Arsenal). For those over 12, the journey time increases to an hour and a half.

Only when they reach 16 can prospects be recruited from all over the country, though, of course, if the player's any good he will doubtless be signed up with another academy by that time, making a compensation fee payable. That's what happened with Theo Walcott. And while very few compensation packages will be as large as the one Southampton received for losing their jet-propelled striker, this is an expensive road to tread if taken all the time. It is much cheaper to search your own backyard for the right stuff.

Luckily, when it comes hotbeds of talent, London ranks with the very best. Just look at the team England sent to the World Cup in Germany. Of the regular starters, Rio Ferdinand, John Terry, Ashley Cole, Frank Lampard and Joe Cole all came through the London system. So did David Beckham before signing schoolboy forms at Manchester United. On the downside, however, is the fact that Arsenal are effectively competing with another 12 clubs for the limited number of boys good enough to make it. The Club has no complaints – the system works alright and thanks to some sharp scouts in an efficient network it grabs more than its fair share of the best boys. Nevertheless, it would be foolish and unreasonable to expect them to settle for that.

Circumstances change. Now the game has gone truly global, countries and borders mean a lot less. Hence the arrival from the continent of a long line of youngsters who have gone on to be nurtured in the Arsenal way. Most of them, inevitably, had already represented other clubs by the time they reached London, but, such is their age and inexperience, they quickly evolved into Arsenal products. Top of the pile so far is the brilliant Francesc Fabregas, prised away from Barcelona when only 16 to become the youngest player ever to turn out and then score for the first team. But think, too, of Philippe Senderos, signed at 17

from Servette, of Switzerland; or Arturo Lupoli, a deadly finisher from Parma; or Nicklas Bendtner, another highly promising striker who spent his formative years at FC Copenhagen. Though Swiss, Italian and Danish respectively, these players, thanks to their football education, can now be described as having Arsenal in their blood.

The list also includes Johan Djourou (Switzerland), Sebastian Larsson (Sweden), Vito Mannone (Italy), Giorgos Efrem (Cyprus), Armand Traoré (France), Vincent van den Berg (Holland). Birthplaces don't matter. Their ability, on the other hand, most certainly does. You could argue that these players are no different from Essex's Tony Adams or, going back further, Liam Brady, spotted as a teenager in Dublin. If it's simply a question of geography, look at someone such as Jérémie Aliadière: as a Parisian he actually lived closer to Arsenal than, say, George Armstrong, who moved from Newcastle in 1961.

Going back to Brady, it seems entirely apt that one of the most gifted players ever to come through the ranks finds himself in charge of Arsenal's young guns. As head of youth development since 1996, the Irishman oversees the challenging task of recruiting and moulding the stars of the future. Effectively, the job of Brady and his staff is to present Wenger with individuals capable of making the step up – a none-too-easy task given the aforementioned standards involved. Making things more complicated still, these days the best children are courted as young as seven or eight. Much later than that and rival academies will have already tied down the pick of the crop.

A decision has to be made, therefore, at an incredibly early age. Brady says: "You look at an eight-year-old and you're still looking for the same qualities that you always have done – can he play, what are his skills like, does he understand when to pass – nothing different there. It's only when they get to puberty, to 16 or so, that you start evaluating whether they're going to be strong enough physically."

That's where the big gamble lies: second-guessing a child's development on the physical side. With the modern game revolving like never before around pace and power, a youngster can have all the ability in the world, but if he can't hold his own physically amongst the big boys then those skills become virtually redundant.

On the question of fitness, too, things aren't quite what they were. As a rule, today's children are nowhere near as active as they were 30 years ago in the days when a kickabout in the park had yet to be displaced by the lure of computer games. As a result, the first requirement in becoming a professional athlete – that most fundamental ability of being able to run around – can't be properly fulfilled by the same number of children as in the past.

Brady remembers a recent youth tournament in Italy. What he saw at the end gave him quite a shock. "There were some kids doing a demonstration of skills. You should have seen them: fat and overweight. I couldn't believe it. But it's the same everywhere. It's not so much what they eat these days as the fact that they don't get the kind of exercise we used to."

In an effort to improve that situation and, crucially, to maximise the time spent practising rather than simply playing matches, three training sessions a week are organised by the academy's junior arm, for age groups ranging from Under 9s to Under 16s. The venue is Hale End Training Centre, the Club's academy base in Walthamstow, where immaculate grass pitches combine with a floodlit AstroTurf surface and a cavernous indoor gym to provide enviable facilities. As far as the coaches there are concerned, the more often they can get the kids onto the training pitch to practise skills and team play, the better chance they will have of producing good players. Yet that has increasingly become a major bugbear: finding enough hours in the day to offer the right amount of practice without impinging too heavily on schoolwork.

As it is, the system places a huge responsibility on parents, some of whom struggle through the London traffic in the evening rush hour to get their children to Hale End on time. Those families living in south London might not return home before 11pm. With homework to fit in and school in the morning, undertaking this same journey three nights a week can be a draining experience.

David Court appreciates that. As Brady's righthand man since the start, he knows all about the problems faced by parents and children alike. He knows, too, that not all of the youngsters can bank on their parents helping out. "We've got kids of 15 coming across from Norbury and Croydon by themselves on the bus and Tube," he says. "If you want to be a player, you'll do that. On the other hand, we've got kids who live in Tottenham (right on top of Hale End) who'll be late all the time or don't turn up at all."

Having graduated through the youth ranks himself, Court went on to play more than 200 games for Arsenal in the years leading up to the 1970/1971 Double campaign. His background in business and attention to detail dovetails well with Brady's football instincts to oversee an operation that has expanded beyond recognition since the pair came together in 1996. Then only a handful of people assisted Brady and Court; now their staff number over 100.

In terms of infrastructure, Richard Carr, a longstanding member of the board, acts as a conduit between the directors and youth development. As Brady's boss, Carr is answerable to the board as to how the department is run. A familiar figure at Hale End and Shenley, Carr doesn't need telling that the large sums of money apportioned to this sector don't see a return overnight. Court puts it nicely:

"Youth development is a bit like the Queen Mary," he says. "It doesn't turn around that quickly!"

When it eventually does, though, the results can be financially rewarding. Isaiah Rankin, for instance, was sold to Bradford City in 1999 for £1.3 million. "That's unheard of now," Court says. "At one time you used to be able to justify your existence if you weren't producing players good enough for Arsenal by selling them on at a healthy profit." But the collapse of ITV Digital, which had paid the Football League a small fortune to cover its games exclusively, meant the spending power of clubs was virtually slashed overnight. In contrast to Rankin, Court says that Steve Sidwell (now at Chelsea) "went to Reading for peanuts compared to what a good young English player would normally cost".

Yet Arsenal's reward can often come a bit later, with sell-on clauses in contracts capable of snaring some very tidy sums. Jermaine Pennant's £6 million-plus transfer to Liverpool, for example, didn't just profit Birmingham City: a decent percentage of that fee ended up in London. Ashley Cole's situation was different. Here was someone who had graduated through the ranks to become the first home-grown English player in a long while to establish himself in Arsenal's first team. An England regular to boot, that's what made Cole's acrimonious defection to Chelsea all the more disappointing for the clutch of coaches who'd had a hand in his development. Regrettable as Cole's exit was, the money received did help to offset a sizeable budget. Such a transfer tends to justify the youth development department's very existence.

It is a department, however, not without its testing moments. Dealing with children these days, particularly those from deprived inner city areas, requires a lot more than just football coaching skills. Indeed, Brady has learnt that it helps to have the instincts of a social worker: "We had a meeting the other day and asked the lads to raise their hands if they'd ever been in contact with drugs. Half of them put their hands up. The stories you hear about the way some of these kids have been brought up are frightening."

Court agrees. "A lot of our boys come from very difficult backgrounds. With so many singleparent families, it's a different way of life from the one I was used to."

Yet as well as showing lots of understanding, coaches know they've got to maintain high levels of discipline for the whole thing to work. That also extends to the behaviour of parents during matches, when tempers on the sidelines have been known to get a bit frayed. Brady and his staff, therefore, gather the parents together at the start of each season to reiterate the standards expected and a code of practice is issued. "There are certain academy rules that we adhere to," Brady says. "The parents, for example, aren't allowed to shout from the sidelines at

their kids. It doesn't do any good. The kids are getting mixed messages."

Unfortunately, not every club is the same. "Sometimes it's embarrassing how other parents behave," Court says. "It's like a bear fight. You go to some places at under 9 level and the parents think they're playing Arsenal's first team! The kids are under extreme pressure. The trouble is, if their people start shouting, ours inevitably get involved. We've had a few hairy situations, I can tell you. People see the red and white shirt and badly want to beat it."

That's life, you might say; something to which the players will have to get used. Maybe so, but these pressure-cooker contests at such an early stage do nothing for the development of the boys involved. Neither do the unrealistic expectations of pushy parents. "Not all parents are as supportive as they can be," Court says. "You see boys constantly looking over for the approval of their dad. It might just take a shake of the head to put the kid on the floor."

Some parents get carried away, banking on their son achieving success to earn his family a fortune. Expectation levels rise further still when England recognition comes along, which it invariably does for quite a number of boys. However, selection methods have changed. In the past, if you played for England Schoolboys, you were regarded as one of the best prospects in the country. These days, anything up to 50 or 60 boys can be called up as the England coaches try to sift out the best. With this in mind, Court and his colleagues have to bring parents back down to earth. "I say to them: 'Look it's great that your lad's played for England – I'd be proud if he was my son – but don't get too excited. If they start picking him when he's 19 or 20, that's when you can really let it go because you've got a real player there'."

Another problem Arsenal face at junior level is the attitude of certain opponents who just want to win, no matter the style of football being ingrained into impressionable youngsters. It is that most old-fashioned and entrenched of approaches to youth football in Britain – the raw hunger for victory – that devours any reservations about style and technique. At Arsenal it's different, which isn't altogether surprising when you've got a purist such as Wenger orchestrating from the top, and Brady, an elusive artist in his playing days, pulling strings at ground level. These two aren't about to compromise lifelong principles for a cheap thrill.

"It's easy to get drawn into the results business by playing your strongest team all the time," says Brady. "But we do what's best all round here and if that means playing 16 year olds against kids two years older and getting beaten, so be it. At least we're playing in the right way, teaching good football. We believe it will benefit the boys a lot more than just winning every weekend."

Fair point. In any case, what's the use of adopting one style of play – a direct

and physical approach – when Wenger’s first team is setting standards with an exquisite passing game? When the call comes to go across and join first-team training (as eventually happens to anyone worth their salt), young players would find themselves hopelessly out of their depth. Consequently, Wenger insists that the Club’s junior teams copy the seniors in most areas of play. Systems are similar, so are the familiar traits of quick-fire passing and movement, a natural composure in possession and the must-have quality of scorching pace. Pick any age group: it is like watching a mini version of the real deal.

"Our argument has always been: come to the best place to learn your trade," Court says. "No one’s guaranteeing you a game, but we’d like to think you’ll get a living out of the game at least."

It’s difficult to argue with that when you start counting all the youth graduates from Arsenal now plying their trade up and down the land. To illustrate the point, Court once pinned up on the noticeboard at Shenley a Premiership XI made up entirely of former Arsenal players, just to prove to the academy coaches and staff that they were doing a sound job. Stuart Taylor, Moritz Volz, Julian Gray, Neil Kilkeny, David Bentley, Jerome Thomas, Jay Bothroyd, Pennant – all players who had found a home in the top flight.

"It worked out that there was a full team plus one sub," Court says with a fair degree of satisfaction. "No other club in the Premiership could boast that." Other clubs know, when they get their hands on a former Arsenal player, that they have recruited someone brought up correctly, and taught habits that’ll stand them in good stead throughout their careers.

As for producing players good enough for Arsenal, the youth development department feels more optimistic than ever. Meticulous to a fault, Court has done some calculations. "People used to say that if you can get one youth graduate a year making the first team, you’re doing OK. That’s unrealistic now. If you can get one every two or three years, you’re doing well and I think we’ll do that over the next five or six years because we’ve got boys who we think are the equal of those the boss likes at the moment."

Wenger agrees, confirming to shareholders at the Club’s 2006 annual general meeting that the academy was starting to bear fruit. "A concern people have is that maybe we’ve developed fewer English players than foreign talent," he said. "It’s down to one basic reason, and that is that England responded late with the quality in the academies. But in the next three or four years we will produce real domestic talent because we have really top-level domestic talent at the Club."

Those words must have sounded good to Messrs Brady and Court, to people such as Steve Bould, in charge of the youth team, as well as all the coaches working so diligently throughout the system. "Our job isn’t to produce England



players, but I think only Chelsea had more players than us in the World Cup," Court says. "And we were the only club with three teenagers in Germany – Djourou, Walcott and Fabregas. So we think we've got a really good story to tell here"

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **A Bould move**

**As the most self-effacing member of Arsenal's famous Back Four, Steve Bould wasn't an obvious candidate for becoming a coach, but he did – and he's loving every minute of it...**

One of the boys, a real man's man, an irreverent rascal popular with everyone, a down-to-earth joker forever fuelling the banter: that was Steve Bould at Arsenal. It's hard not to smile when recalling the memories. On the way back from games, he would prop up his blistered size 12s at the back of the coach and play cards with the lads, shoveling down great mounds of grub when his booming voice wasn't filling the air with his favourite swear words.

"Language, Bouldy!" George Graham would shout like some disapproving dad, an admonishment that became a well-worn catchphrase. But our boss, in truth, didn't really mind. Not if his defender was doing the business on matchdays, blotting out strikers with the minimum of fuss as he habitually did for close on 10 years. And that's something else we should mention when discussing Steve Bould: he was a towering centre-half of the very highest quality. And just look at him now. Several years on, he is still with Arsenal only now, rather than a player, he is the Club's youth-team coach. Bould sits up the front of the bus these days – no doubt the butt of cheeky quips from the back – in the kind of responsible position he could never have foreseen in those carefree playing days spent keeping clean sheets.

As an original member of Arsenal's famous back four, this angular stopper always tended to duck the main shaft of limelight, preferring instead to just get on with his job. That was his style. It suited his personality. So whenever the plaudits showered down on that miserly rearguard – which they regularly did, of course – he'd invariably head for cover, never minding one bit if his great mate Tony Adams emerged as the hero.

You can, I suppose, find some parallels now in the way Bould works so diligently behind the scenes, educating and moulding the stars of the future. A couple of steps removed from the intense furnace that is Arsène Wenger's domain, my former team-mate is able to focus on his job without having to endure the same levels of pressure that turn every first-team result into a celebration or a crisis. Yet this is no cosy job to keep an old pro busy, a means of looking after one of their own in his retirement. On the contrary, the post of youth team coach carries plenty of clout and no little cachet, particularly somewhere such as Arsenal, where standards are so high and some of the most talented young players in the world are brought into the system.

Consequently, his role must be an earnest vocation, a challenging task requiring patience and skill. In short, finding the right recipe for producing top-notch players has become a genuine passion for this proud son of Stoke.

One autumn afternoon, I find Bould virtually alone at Arsenal's Shenley training ground. With the first team off on their travels and most of the staff finished for the day, Bould is tying up some loose ends in the roomy office he shares with reserve team manager Neil Banfield. With paperwork, books and DVDs covering his desk and a laptop in the corner humming away, I can't help but smile at this well-ordered scene. I had, after all, seen Bouldy in his pomp as the very antithesis of a serious coach.

There isn't a footballer in the world who knows for sure how he'll react when he finally hangs up his boots. Until it happens for real, you simply can't tell. Attitudes and outlooks can change overnight. And when injury finally finished Bould's swansong at Sunderland in 2000, he didn't have a clue what lay in store. A few months of inactivity, however, were enough to persuade him to take the first steps on the coaching ladder in the form of his 'C' and 'B' licences. It wasn't that he had any burning desire to go into that area, more the simple fact that it gave him something to do. Word spread fast, though, Bould says: "Somehow, Liam Brady got to hear about this and phoned me to ask if I would like to come and work with the kids. Once I had a go I really enjoyed it. It got me back into the football mode that I missed."

As head of youth development, Brady was always on the look-out for former Arsenal players who could fill a role. With Paul Davis already on board, the appointment of Bould was another step towards maintaining a strong Arsenal heritage within the coaching ranks.

To start with, Bould took over the academy's Under 12 team before eventually progressing to share the Under 16s with Davis. By this time, it was becoming fairly obvious that, when it came to coaching kids and commanding respect, Bould was made of the right stuff. There was a natural presence about the man that made people sit up and listen, and that wasn't just down to the imposing 6'3" frame.

Gaining his 'A' licence helped. In any case, it was a necessary qualification to have once Bould had been handed the plum job of running the Under 18s. Looking back now he can understand why academy rules state that you must have this award. "It does give you a structure, teaches you how to sit down and plan a session and how to work through a session. But ultimately it's down to putting in the hours out on the training ground. The longer you do it, the more experienced you become and the more you end up feeling like a proper coach."

Organisational skills, it appears, are now a big part of the job. When I ask

how many players are under his wing, he looks at a whiteboard on the far wall where, every morning, the names are written down with a note alongside denoting whether or not they are fit for training. Written in felt tip, 19 names are listed, spanning the two-year age range of the scholar system. Not all remain, however, under his jurisdiction. Several have already flown the nest, cherrypicked by Wenger to train with the first team. "The one thing you do learn is that whatever session you've planned, it very rarely happens. Someone'll get injured or the first team or the reserves will want an extra player. Your session can go from 16 players to 11 rapidly. You have to think on your feet."

Likewise, the youngsters are asked to use their own brains, not just on the pitch but off it as well in order to prepare for what the statistics tell you is the most likely outcome – a life outside football having failed to make the grade. Three afternoons a week they walk across to the education block adjacent to the main building at Shenley to study for their Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. They also take an Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) course, which is geared towards the intricacies of succeeding in their chosen profession and also addressing some grittier issues.

"Footballers are members of the public," Bould says. "What goes on outside does affect them. Drugs and gangs were never an issue in the past, so through education we have to try to steer our kids away from that. That's what happens across the way here. It's not so much about maths and what have you, more about social education. The psychological side of the game is also studied. Some kids might learn through that, write down what they did in training the day before. Others might learn through video. None of it can do any harm."

Yet Bould has seen enough tragic cases in his time to realise that some of his charges are swimming against the tide, given their deprived backgrounds and the total lack of parental care, along with the influence of street culture. In those situations, he sees only one choice. "As long as you're honest and sincere with them, don't fill them full of rubbish, then you've got a chance." Forthright as ever, he has never been the sort of man to string people along. He comes, after all, from a tough working-class background himself.

That said, the relationship between coach and player has changed dramatically since the day Bould set out in the game as a raw 16-yearold at Stoke City. "When we started we were all a little bit frightened of the coaches. Because of the tasks, we were more like members of the groundstaff. The whole coaching structure has changed, with not so much barking and shouting now. It doesn't work at youth level or in first teams any more. Coaches are seen more as teachers than someone to be frightened of. Without discipline it all breaks down, of course, but the relationship is different."

Yet Bould isn't quite sure if the modern system is better in every aspect. The old apprenticeship system was certainly pretty tough, but all those menial tasks tended to instill a solid work ethic, making it difficult to forget that you were at the bottom of the food chain, with much ground to make up before you could claim to have made it. "Really, we were skivvies who played football. That's how it seems now. We had to paint the ground, roll the pitch and occasionally you'd get called out to do a weights session. Three or four mornings a week you'd train as a group.

"Now that the boys don't have to do those jobs, it does take something away. There's still a place for that bit of discipline for a couple of years, to teach them that they haven't actually made it yet. There are lots of kids who think what a lovely, easy life this is. In many ways that attitude stops them from moving on to the next level. For those two years, some think they're firstteam players. I'm not saying we should get them painting the ground again – those were the dark days. In many ways it's a lot better now, but they need to realise that they still have to work doubly hard at their game to improve."

When he says 'better' he is referring to the drastic improvements in facilities and methods, not least the way players are trained. "The emphasis has changed beyond all recognition. It's more scientific now, more ball-oriented. The physical side has completely changed. We used to do laps of the pitch, run cross-countries, and sprint up and down the terraces. None of that's done any more and players are physically better for it – you've only got to see the pace that the game is played at now. In our era, our legs were sometimes run out."

Technological aids have become an increasing part of a footballer's learning process, too. We've all heard about ProZone, the computerised data analysis system used by most Premiership clubs, which measures everything that moves on a football field. "We have all our games videoed now," Bould says. "We can make our own DVDs to compare what our lads are doing to what a Premiership player is doing. The learning process now is so different. Rather than just saying: 'Go and watch him play,' we get that player on DVD, slow the action down, show stats from ProZone and compare a DVD of a senior player to one of our own. It's a great way of teaching the kids."

In many ways, the youngsters need that kind of help more than ever before because today's generation isn't imbued with the same natural instincts that come from playing in the park from dawn until dusk. Time spent practising is nowhere near as long, with organised sessions at junior clubs usurping impromptu games on the local recreation ground. Jumpers for goalposts? A thing of the past. So is the habit of playing cricket, golf, football or tennis according to the time of the year. It just doesn't happen in this computer-driven world.

This reality became apparent to Bould during a youth tournament in Mexico. Trying to fill the time one day with a bit of fun, he and the other coaches suggested a competition: coaches versus kids at tennis and golf. Little did they know this idea would prove a complete non-starter. "It turned out that most of the lads had never even held a tennis racket before," Bould says. "When the ball came their way, their hand-eye co-ordination was terrible. As for hitting a golf ball with a nine-iron – forget it. The coaches won easily.

"Before then, I'd taken it for granted that our kids would be able to turn their hand to any sport. Seeing as they're good at football, you assume they'll be talented at most ball games. But unlike us, they haven't gone through that ritual of playing tennis on the municipal courts during Wimbledon fortnight or swinging a golf club over the fields when, say, the Open is on."

So while the quality of training at professional clubs has come on leaps and bounds, it has had to do so, in a sense, since the boys clearly need the practice. "When I was on schoolboy forms at Stoke we'd train every Thursday night on a cinder pitch at Keele University," Bould says. "There were about 30 of us, aged between 12 and 15, with one ball, having a game. That's all we did. Not a lot of thought went into it. But the thing then was that, unlike today, we'd be playing football every day anyhow so perhaps we didn't need so much training."

So what are the differences between handling a promising 17-year-old in the youth team and getting the best every week from an established first teamer? "We are trying to develop individuals rather than trying to win games. It's a completely different mentality in that respect. Although results do matter, they aren't the be-all and end-all. Loads of teams have won youth cups, for example, and never had players who've gone on to play at any great level. When we play other teams, the result obviously means a lot to them: they can go back to their clubs and say 'we beat the Arsenal on Saturday'. But is that the right attitude? Have those kids got a chance of getting in their first team? Sometimes I have to question that.

"Our kids are actually better than you sometimes think. Working with them every day it's easy just to pick out their faults, but when you compare them to players elsewhere you realise they'll do alright."

That fact hit home the day Bould and Banfield travelled up to St Andrews to watch three of their players – Nicklas Bendtner, Fabrice Muamba and Sebastian Larsson – play their first game for Birmingham City, having gone there on loan. Settling down in his seat, Bould had never felt so nervous. He needn't have worried. "They were probably the best players out on that pitch and Nicklas scored. It was like watching your own kids. To see them go on and do well, at another club especially, when everyone had been talking about their promise,



was great."

As for frustrations, he does have a few. "We don't train enough, especially lower down the age scale. Maybe it's a London thing because travel is difficult, but we don't get the boys often enough. Not as much as they do in, say, Spain or Holland. Having said that, our kids have been as good as anyone in foreign tournaments. We are catching up."

Listening to Bould talk so animatedly on these topics, it's obvious that he cares a great deal about getting it right. This business of producing home-reared players with the necessary technique and talent to compare with any in the world has clearly galvanised a character with football in his blood. "It might sound a bit trite, but I do have a passion for finding a way to improve the kids at this Club and in the country as a whole. There's no reason, with the money that's about now, that we shouldn't have the best kids in the world. We should certainly be able to compete with the likes of Spain, Italy, Holland and France. The French model produced a World Cup-winning team in 10 to 15 years. We should be able to follow suit."

**Alan Smith**

## PROFILE

# **Rocky remembered**

**A tough upbringing, a career wrecked by injuries and a tragically premature death have failed to dim the memories of a gifted footballer who did everything with a smile**

Rocky was a home-grown hero. A lad from Lewisham who lived the dream. The creative architect of 1989, the wonder-year when Arsenal won the Championship at Anfield so late on that the Liverpool defence already had one eye on lifting the trophy. To the joyous, hysterical and frank amazement of every watching Arsenal fan, the team overturned the odds, and Liverpool, winning 2-0 to snatch the title themselves on goals scored, and demonstrating in the process will, spirit, backbone, muscle, strength, fun and a sense of destiny. The living embodiment of all those virtues was the man that they called Rocky Rocastle.

His real name was David, but Rocky he became within seconds of inhabiting Highbury. It suited him. Dazzlingly skilful but also strong, he had all the hallmarks of a great player. But he also had the mentality of a great player. Unafraid and unflinching, he was a tackler of challenges and of men. The North Bank simply loved him, George Graham played him, England soon called for him. He was a shooting star.

Then a serious knee injury thwarted his twisting skill and diminished his speed. Graham reluctantly sold him to Leeds United. He played six more years in English football without ever scaling the predicted heights, before moving to Malaysia to finish his playing career. Retired and back home, he was diagnosed with cancer and died at just 33. Highbury fell silent for its hero.

David Carlyle Rocastle, born May 2, 1967, will always hold a place in Highbury's rich history. He signed his first professional contract in December 1984 and with the flourish of his signature Arsenal had bought themselves a diamond. In 13 years at the Club from apprenticeship to departure he would win two Championships and a League Cup, while also collecting 14 caps for England and the Young Footballer of the Year award.

Yet it was not just his achievements that impressed the wider world; it was the manner of them. He had everything a right-sided midfielder could need on the pitch and then added a smile. When a relatively senior Alan Smith arrived from Leicester City in the summer of 1987, he and his wife attended their first formal Arsenal dinner with some trepidation: they didn't know anybody. The first person to detach himself from the crowd was Rocastle. "My name's David," he said. "If there's anything I can do..." He was barely 20.

His father died when he was only five but his mother, Linda, brought him up

with his two brothers and two sisters to the highest of standards, with an emphasis on exceptional manners. Give or take a boy's natural bent for mischief, he faithfully followed her instruction all his life at Highbury. The ferocious guidance of Pat Rice – then youth-team coach at Arsenal – augmented the discipline already in place. He was kind, welcoming and friendly, but with a competitor's edge on the pitch.

He made his debut in September 1985, against Newcastle United, having recently turned 18. It was the kind of game to alienate all but the hardiest fans. The BBC Radio reporter could not bring himself to say any more than: "Nil-nil and back to the studio." It was that bad.

Nevertheless, the young, willing, thrusting character in midfield had caught the eye. The North Bank cheered him and even as Arsenal embarked on a significant run of failure, beaten 6-1 at Everton, losing to Luton Town in the FA Cup and sacking Don Howe as manager, Rocky was still there, a light amid the gloom.

Steve Burtenshaw was appointed as caretaker manager and only 14,843 fans turned out to watch the visit of West Bromwich Albion in the penultimate home game of the season. Dark days enlivened only by displays of youthful exuberance from Rocky, Tony Adams, Paul Davis and Martin Hayes.

Into this walked George Graham, the new manager. Straight-laced, determined, unimpressed by star labels, he announced on arrival: "I want ambitious young men with the right attitude, allied with skill. I think that would be the ideal combination." He told Charlie Nicholas to take out his earrings and wear a blazer and tie. Angered by Kenny Sansom calling him George, he said frostily: "Call me boss".

Two seasons later, he had sold them both. There were rumours he was interested in Tony Cottee, Terry Butcher, Kerry Dixon and the beautifully elegant Preben Elkjaer. No deal. He bought Perry Groves from Colchester instead.

Within a year Arsenal had won their first trophy: the 1987 League Cup against Liverpool at Wembley, and in order to get there had beaten their fiercest rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-finals. Rocky was 19 years old but he was warrior enough to be in the thick of the tumultuous action as the semi-final replay stretched into extra time with the score tied at 1-1.

A mishit shot from Arsenal team-mate Ian Allinson suddenly arrived at his feet, 10 yards from goal. Lesser beings might have panicked as the unexpected gift arrived, his back towards the goal, a defender present. Rocastle merely spun away from his marker, riding the vain challenge and with all Arsenal supporters holding their collective breath, he struck his shot cleanly, under the advancing

goalkeeper Ray Clemence. Simple, urgent, perfect. You could have offered the Arsenal crowd Pelé and most would have said, at that moment: 'Thank you, but no. We'll keep Rocky. He was born to play for us'.

And so it seemed. Arsenal reached another League Cup Final the following year, losing 2-3 to Luton Town, though they finished 24 points adrift of champions Liverpool in the League. But all this time the bond in midfield between Davis, Rocastle and Mickey Thomas was growing, strengthening and hinting at a glittering future on the far horizon. No one could have guessed how close that horizon really was.

The 1988/1989 season is justifiably renowned as the most remarkable in Arsenal's history. Indeed, for sheer impact and its shock ending, few clubs anywhere in the course of English football have experienced such a nerve-jangling, down-to-the-wire climax to a season.

Rocky played in all 38 League matches that season, demonstrating Graham's trust in him. His dazzling runs and his defensive contribution allowed his manager the illusion that he was playing an extra man. That season, too, he was called up for England duty, making his debut against Denmark in a European Championship qualifier. It seemed certain he would make the World Cup squad for Italy the following year. His star was rising and rising.

Final game of the season. Arsenal and Liverpool top of the League, Liverpool with 76 points, Arsenal 73; Liverpool had a goal difference of +39, Arsenal +35. When all was said and slide-ruled, it came down to this: the visitors had to win by two clear goals to draw level on goal difference and snatch the title on goals scored. The bad news was that visitors very, very rarely won at Anfield by one scrappy goal, let alone two clear ones.

The *Daily Mirror* were fairly opinionated on the subject. "You don't have a prayer, Arsenal," they predicted. True, Liverpool had gone the 20 previous games unbeaten and Arsenal had not won in this rarefied domain since 1974/1975, when victory came courtesy of Evertonian Alan Ball.

On the pitch: John Barnes, John Aldridge, Ian Rush were playing up front for Liverpool, with the satin-skilled Alan Hansen at the back, and in the middle, the ferocious beast that was Steve McMahon in his prime. Young Rocky would be his opposite number. Terror might have been an appropriate feeling. Instead Rocky was excited. "We were all relaxed and looking forward to it. We knew we should be tense, but we weren't. We were joking and laughing in training."

Incredibly, the average age of the Arsenal team was 21 and Graham had done a typically canny job of stoking the young men into a state of true self-belief. Even when the score was 0-0 at half-time, there was no panic in the ranks. The appearance of serenity was maintained, and by the second half the Liverpool

side were falling more deeply into defence.

Even in the midst of this traumatic scene, Rocky remained true to himself. Hansen caught him with a painful tackle at one point, but he accepted the Liverpool man's apologetic handshake. Rocky smiled. "What's up? Getting old?" inquired Rocky. The 51st minute, still stalemate. The 52nd minute, a half-chance header converted by Alan Smith from an indirect free kick by Nigel Winterburn. There was a desperate pause while the referee decided whether Smith had actually touched the ball, while the Liverpool players tried to change his mind. After several million years – lasting a few seconds – the referee pointed to the centre circle. Now the game was on. Arsenal had another 38 minutes to score the necessary second goal, Liverpool to keep them at bay.

Rocky was one of 10 outfield players pounding ever deeper into enemy territory, pushing, urging, willing Liverpool to relent, but perhaps it was all in vain. The clock at Anfield was showing full time. McMahon famously signalled to his team that one minute of play remained by raising a single upright digit. There was a feeling abroad among the Liverpool fans that having suffered the tragic horror of Hillsborough in which 93 of their fans had been crushed to death, this would be a fitting epitaph.

Fate seemed to be indifferent to Arsenal, but then, crucially, Thomas was indifferent to fate. "I'm going upfield to see if I can pinch a goal," he said to a cramp-racked Kevin Richardson. All the more amazing as Barnes was dribbling into the Arsenal box at the time. Richardson shook off his pain, tackled the Liverpool forward and passed back to John Lukic in goal.

Lukic, to Lee Dixon, to Smith, who chested the ball down and laid on a pass to Thomas, fulfilling his prophecy of going forward. He barged his way towards goal, evading defenders, and luckily claiming a bounce off Steve Nicol's legs to arrive at his moment of sporting immortality. He was clean through the Liverpool line with only Bruce Grobbelaar to beat. It would be the last kick of the game. Score and the title was Arsenal's, in the most theatrical, heart-stopping, miraculous manner of all time. Miss and Liverpool were champions. There would be no second chances. It was the classic moment of do or die.

How Thomas stayed calm, cool and sane enough to flick the ball to the goalkeeper's left will remain one of life's enduring mysteries. He probably had no time to think. Every Arsenal fan everywhere remembers where they were at that moment. Almost certainly, they were howling. At the final whistle, it was Rocastle who flew into Thomas's arms to celebrate. For both young men, for different reasons, that would be their finest moment. Rocky was 22.

Disappointment characterised the following season. Arsenal lost their title with inconsistent performances and Bobby Robson, paring down his final team

to go to Italy for the World Cup, chose to eliminate Rocky from his squad. The consolation words were that the player would be "a leading figure at the next World Cup". As a prophecy, it failed. England didn't qualify for the 1994 World Cup Finals in America and by that summer, Rocky was being released from Leeds to Manchester City.

The sad unravelling of his career gathered momentum in, ironically, Arsenal's Championship season of 1990/1991. He broke a toe, was rarely in the team and had to endure a long-term knee injury that involved a series of ravaging operations, before the advent of keyhole surgery, which left him well short of his famous pace and twistability. He was a bystander at Arsenal's final game of the season against Coventry City, although he laid personal disappointments aside to join in the team's celebrations.

There followed his farewell season, which saw a reinvention of sorts as he learned to live and play with his permanently damaged knee. He played 48 games, the same competitor with the same spirit, but with inevitable limitations. As the squad reassembled for pre-season training in July 1992, George Graham had the toughest job of his managerial career: he had to tell Rocky it was time to leave Arsenal.

"George always said it was one of the hardest things he ever had to do, to let Rocky go. He genuinely loved him," former team-mate Alan Smith said. "We were back for pre-season training and they were sitting in George's car, a white BMW, for a long time. The players were all saying: 'What's the gaffer talking to Rocky about'. We asked him later. 'Oh, I'm getting sold to Leeds,' he said. You could see he was emotional.

"Ian Wright was hugely upset. He was one of his best mates. We all were. He was just one of those characters that everybody loved."

Rocastle was in shock and in tears. Graham had tried to explain that with the signings that summer of John Jensen and Geoff Thomas – neither of whom would, in any sense, wed themselves to the Arsenal fans (although much ironic and masochistic pleasure was derived from Jensen's notorious goal drought) – the board felt it best that Rocastle establish himself elsewhere. Leeds were, after all, the League Champions and Gordon Strachan was in his twilight years. Howard Wilkinson was effectively buying Rocastle as Strachan's replacement.

It did not work out exactly as planned. Strachan flared into a combative new lease of life and Rocastle was sold to Manchester City in December 1993. In August 1994, he moved on again, to Glenn Hoddle's Chelsea. The state of his knee was an open secret in football, but Hoddle, who had not exactly prized running during his playing career, was more interested in Rocastle's vision and skill.



Injuries, however, continued to take their toll. He was loaned out to Norwich City, and had a trial for Aberdeen. By 1998 he was playing in the Chelsea reserves. In one last desperate bid to play football he moved abroad with his young family to play for the Malaysian side, Sabah. He played not as a free-loading star in his dotage, but as a genuine ambassador for the game. Sabah benefited from his engaging personality and reached both the final of the Malaysian FA Cup in 1998 and the President Cup 1999. That was his last competitive match. He came home.

Less than a year later he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the immune system. He fought the disease with a typically optimistic outlook and David Dein, the Arsenal vice chairman, promised him a coaching post at Highbury as soon as his recovery allowed. That promise was never fulfilled. On Saturday, March 31, 2001, at the age of 33, David 'Rocky' Rocastle died.

Ian Wright, broadcasting on BBC Radio Five Live, broke down when trying to pay a tribute to his dear friend. All his former team-mates were devastated. Graham Rix, then Portsmouth's manager, locked himself in his office in floods of tears, perhaps remembering that, when he had been sold by Graham, it was Rocastle who wrote him a letter saying: 'Goodbye and good luck'.

That afternoon, as fate would have it, Arsenal were at home to Spurs. A minute's silence was called, but there were fears it wouldn't be observed at the start of such a tense local rivalry. In the event, with Rocastle's former team-mates Adams, Parlour, Dixon, Seaman and Keown standing in the centre circle, and the remainder of the team respectfully at the side, the ground fell utterly silent. It remained that way until the referee, Paul Durkin, blew his whistle: even ancient rivalries had dissolved away in honour of a man who had played football, loved football and enhanced football with his patent decency.

At his funeral six days later, the pallbearers were his brother, Stephen, and former teammates Adams, Wright, Davis, Thomas and Smith. The church was packed with mourners from Arsenal, past and present, alongside his wife Janet and their young children: Ryan, Melissa and Monique.

Two days later Arsenal vanquished Spurs in the semi-final of the FA Cup and at Cardiff for the final against Liverpool, Ryan Rocastle was made the Arsenal mascot. The David Rocastle Trust became Arsenal's chosen charity of the Farewell Season at Highbury and even in the final moments of the beautiful stadium that was Rocastle's home for more than a decade, he was remembered. His old number seven shirt fluttered on the giant screen and, backed by a tumult of applause, the ground rang to words of his song: "Oh, Rocky, Rocky, Rocky, Rocky, Rocky, Rocky, Rocky Rocastle."

**Sue Mott**

**‘Rocky, we’ll miss you’**

A programme tribute to David Rocastle written by vice chairman David Dein following Rocky's death in 2001

"I first saw David Rocastle play in 1983 for the youth team. I remember coming home excitedly from the match and telling my family: 'I've just watched the nearest thing to a Brazilian footballer you are ever likely to see – and he comes from Lewisham!'

"Here was a player with pace, great technique, strength and commitment; a player I was convinced would play for England one day.

"As a member of the Arsenal board and in a position where you shouldn't have favourites, Rocky was unashamedly mine. I remember my wife buying me a wallet one year and in the space where you would usually find a picture of your wife or children, I found a picture of Rocky! She also bought me a coffee table for my office which had legs modelled on Rocky's. My consistent references to him had obviously not gone unnoticed.

"As a player, who can forget his goal that beat Tottenham Hotspur in the League Cup semi-final replay in 1987? Or the long-range strike that beat Peter Schmeichel at Manchester United in 1991 in his last season with us?

"He was a wonderful talent as well as being a fantastic team player. But there was so much more to Rocky than being a gifted footballer: he was a consummate gentleman, warm and modest. In an age when footballers are often accused of being mercenaries, David Rocastle was a prince. His genuine sincerity was remarked upon by so many, even those who may have only met him momentarily.

"I visited him three weeks before his death. He was clearly in very poor health, but he showed a great inner strength, putting a brave face on his difficult situation and enjoying talking about his great days here at Arsenal, including that night of all nights at Anfield in 1989.

"I also took him an Arsenal shirt signed by the players with his name printed on the back. Rocky never played for us in the Premier League and never wore the red shirt complete with his name. He was thrilled by the gift and it was fate that Robert Pires scored the crucial first goal against Spurs on Saturday. [David died on the morning of Arsenal's 2-0 win over Spurs, March 31, 2001] wearing Rocky's number seven shirt.

"The thoughts of the Board of Directors, players, members of staff and all the Arsenal supporters are with David's wife, Janet, and their three children,

Melissa, Monique and Ryan. "Rocky, we'll miss you."

## INTERVIEW

# **World wide web**

**Steve Rowley and his team of scouts criss-cross the globe on a regular basis in the hope of netting those rare special talents who are capable of developing into Arsenal players**

Arsenal's chief scout, Steve Rowley, will never forget his first assignment for Arsène Wenger. He was sitting in the training ground canteen, chatting with some of the coaching staff, when the new boss walked across. "He wanted to know if I could go to Brazil," Rowley recalls with a smile. "We all looked at each other and wondered if it was a wind-up. That kind of thing was unheard of at the time, unheard of."

It certainly isn't now. On average, Rowley finds himself out of the country for four days out of every seven: for weeks on end, in fact, when a tournament needs monitoring. With the game truly global and the search for talent becoming ever more competitive, scouts have had no choice but to grab their passports, pack their bags and hitch a ride on the charabanc, or else get left behind in the mad scramble.

Rowley catches planes the way other people hop on a bus, dashing to far-flung football outposts at a moment's notice. At the last count, he had collected two million air miles, more than enough to get him to Australia and back 10 times over while sipping champagne in first class. Mind you, it will probably be some time before he gets to taste the bubbly. He's far too busy at the moment serving his employers, shuttling across to Europe and Africa or across the Atlantic – specifically to the fertile fields of South America.

A regular visitor to that continent now, Rowley will never forget his first trip to Brazil: it served as a useful introduction for what was to come. Having landed in Rio de Janeiro, he thought the journey was over, only to be told by the group of agents he had arranged to meet that another plane ride was involved in order to reach their final destination. Five hours later, Rowley found himself deep in the Amazon jungle. "The hotel was horrendous," he laughs. "Like a mud hut. I was looking under the bed for snakes, that's how bad it was." Dodgy accommodation aside, he didn't realise at the time that Brazil's football association traditionally go in for this kind of thing – staging internationals all around the country in order to bring their national obsession closer to the people. Sent there to track a particular player, Arsenal's envoy made the best of his lot, even if he did feel slightly underdressed. "It was monsoon weather," he says. "I was standing there in my shorts, absolutely drenched. That was my first experience of South America."



However, definitely not his last. Chile practically feels like Chelmsford, so regular are his sorties to that part of the world. Even so, this jovial son of Essex has never lost his enthusiasm for a job he still regards as a great privilege. Yet you have to be a certain type to cope with the peculiar demands of this unusual job. The never-ending travel certainly doesn't do much for family life. It helps to be single in this combative game, where scouts are on call every hour of the day and are expected to fly off at the drop of a hat as the digging gets ever-deeper for undiscovered seams of talent. "We tend to look at the not-so-obvious – young players at smaller clubs who we think have potential. My scout down there will look at the player two or three times, then he might send me a video and I'll make up my mind whether to go down or not."

Compare this colourful lifestyle to that of Rowley's predecessor, Steve Burtenshaw, a longstanding Arsenal coach in the 1960s and 1970s, and chief scout under George Graham. Like all his peers at the time, Burtenshaw would confine himself mostly to trawling the British Isles for promising players. He might occasionally pop over to Europe for a quick recce, but nothing too elaborate. Foreign trips were classed as unusual, something out of the ordinary. Since those days, however, the job at Arsenal has changed beyond all recognition, thanks, in the main, to Wenger's revolutionary approach. As soon as he arrived in 1996, the Frenchman's encyclopaedic knowledge of world football was always going to demand more men on the ground. If he was aware of someone worth watching in, say, deepest Peru, it was essential to have local eyes and ears keeping tabs on their progress.

From Cancun to Cairo, Lima to Lagos, Wenger wanted it covered. You can't expect to do that with only six or seven scouts, which is how many Rowley inherited on succeeding Burtenshaw. Multiply that total by four to get an idea of how many operatives Arsenal now employ worldwide.

Rowley's success, what's more, ultimately depends on the judgment and knowledge of his many lieutenants. Information is everything. 'Intelligence', they call it, in true espionage style. "My team do all the hard work in finding players," Rowley says. "It's just that I've got to make the final decision on what they find. The thing about scouts is that you've got to have good contacts. If you haven't, you're dead. You need to be on very good terms with all the managers and agents. One might ring up and say: 'We've got a good player, would you like to come and watch?' That's vital when you're working in a big country. You can't just wander about anywhere hoping to find good players. You need to know where to look."

It all seems a far cry from Rowley's formative days as youth team manager at non-league Ilford, where he first met Terry Burton, a man who went on to

become an extremely gifted and influential coach within Arsenal's youth set-up, but who, at that stage, was merely helping out with a bit of part-time work. Chatting in Ilford's clubhouse bar one day, Burton asked Rowley if he knew of any decent players knocking about in the area. After recommending a few – notably Stewart Robson (who went on to play 151 League games for the Gunners) and John Moncur (who subsequently joined Tottenham Hotspur) – Rowley's contacts and judgment were deemed impressive enough for him to be asked to oversee Arsenal's scouting network in the east London area.

As fate would have it, those very early days led to Rowley's most famous find to date, a player who went on to serve the Club for 22 years, eventually becoming the most successful captain in Arsenal's history: Tony Adams. Adams, however, very nearly escaped the net after a misunderstanding one evening. "I saw Tony playing in a junior game for West Ham; he was about 11 or 12 at the time. Straightaway, you could see he was special: he had something about him, so I asked his dad, who was standing on the sideline, if he'd like to bring his son down to Arsenal for some training. Well, they came down to Highbury and saw the coach in charge, Tommy Coleman, who'd only just joined himself. So Tone's dad, Alex, says: 'Steve Rowley sent us down.' Tommy says: 'Who's Steve Rowley?' and Alex starts walking out in a huff, taking his boy with him, thinking there'd been some kind of mistake. Luckily, Tommy called them back and said they'd might as well stay seeing as they'd come all the way from Dagenham."

Not surprisingly, the capture of Adams enhanced Rowley's reputation once it became clear what a great prospect he'd found. When George Graham took charge, Rowley started compiling detailed assessments of upcoming opponents for the manager to use in his prematch team talks. At the same time, he would assist Burtenshaw in an area that was beginning to expand. "My first trip abroad was to Auxerre in the south of France, to see a player we'd been recommended," Rowley remembers. "I drove all the way down. Must have taken me about nine hours. I got to the stadium and straight away I could tell something was wrong. It was too quiet. There was litter everywhere. I asked a bloke and he said the game had been the day before!

"Nowadays the information from the local scouts is generally so good that that kind of thing rarely happens. When it was less well organised, it used to happen quite a lot."

On the technical side, Arsenal's way of operating includes a comprehensive computer database that contains precise details on thousands of players. In addition, a new system allows a scout out in the field to compile his report on his laptop straight after a game and email it back to base. That way, the information

is waiting for Rowley the very next day. From there it passes on to the top man. "Every Tuesday the reports go to the manager," Rowley says. "He reads them all. He's got a computer for a brain and can remember details from months ago. He'll look at a player's report and say something like: 'Oh, he's improved on his crossing, has he?'"

In addition to that, the pair meet every day to keep abreast of a vast range of events, from the latest news on potential targets, to the progress of youngsters already signed up. For it to work, though, the professional relationship between manager and chief scout must be fairly harmonious. In other words, they must share similar ideas on what constitutes a good player.

In this respect, the criteria have changed noticeably at the top clubs. It's no longer enough to be lavishly blessed with ability if you measure 5ft 5ins and weigh 10 stone soaking wet. More than ever before, it helps to have impressive attributes on the purely physical side. Though they've always been popular, the twin weapons of outstanding pace and exceptional strength now appear higher up the wanted list than ever before. In addition, though, Wenger wants his players to have a bit of footballing know-how.

"The gaffer always asks the same question first: 'Is he intelligent?'. The second question is: 'Has he got power?'. The way we play here is with quick counter-attacks based on power. You've got to have good technique and good intelligence. The manager loves an intelligent player."

Which is why, with the pool of English talent shrinking, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find local boys with sufficient talent to measure up to Wenger's exacting standards. Academy rules state that you can recruit only youngsters who live within 90 minutes' travelling distance of the club, restricting the size of the casting net. "You've also got to remember that there are another 15 clubs in and around London with virtually the same catchment area as Arsenal. It's very difficult. What I will say is that kids will get a chance here. English, French, Spanish, whatever – the gaffer doesn't care as long as they're good enough."

By way of example, you have only got to look at Francesc Fabregas, the extravagantly gifted midfielder, who at the age of 16 years and 212 days, became Arsenal's youngest-ever goalscorer in December 2003. As with Adams, Rowley could tell straight away that he was looking at something special when he flew down to Spain on the urgent advice of his local scout. It was the same with Gaël Clichy in France. You had to move fast, so obvious was the talent. "If you miss the Fabregases and Clichys of this world, you'd never be able to buy them at a later date," Rowley insists. "You couldn't afford it and the clubs wouldn't sell them. For that reason the scouting of 15-18 year olds is so vitally important.

"The gaffer might not always have time to see some of these players in the flesh before signing them, but he will make seven or eight phone calls to people who know the player really well, asking about their character and so forth. He also likes to have players watched during training, if that's possible, to study their attitude and intelligence. He places great store in that."

Although Rowley says he sees the same faces at every game, camaraderie is kept to a minimum by the very nature of a task requiring a certain amount of secrecy. "There is a friendliness between scouts, but it's more politeness than anything. If you get too friendly, you talk too much and you might give something away." That's an accusation which is unlikely ever to be levelled at Rowley; indeed, this interview is the first he has granted during 25 years at the Club. Anonymity helps in his line of work.

And it's work, incidentally, that he enjoys immensely. You have got to love football, of course – watching as many games as he does, both live and on video, requires very high levels of concentration and stamina – but the rewards are substantial if you count the simple pleasure of sitting down to proudly watch one of your discoveries excel in the first team.

In addition, of course, there is the thought of stumbling upon the one-in-a-million player whose exceptional talent immediately smacks you in the face. That rare sight never fails to send a shiver down the spine. "You always go to matches feeling excited and invariably you end up feeling let down afterwards. But when you do find someone special, it's unbelievable – like scoring a goal, I suppose. The same type of elation."

In essence, that's what keeps Rowley going. It's what persuades him, for instance, to fly in and out of Mexico City in a day just to see someone play; what induces him to spend so long on planes that he can name the make of engine just by listening to the roar, and even forecast exactly where the plane will stack above Heathrow while waiting to land.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **Training days**

Facilities manager Sean O'Connor explains how Arsenal's state-of-the-art training ground at London Colney ensures the Club stay ahead of the game, both on and off the pitch

Walking into Arsenal's training ground on a sunny winter's morning, you are immediately struck by how ordered everything is: the paths are clear of leaves and rubbish, the lake and flowerbeds are beautifully tended and the flag is blowing gently in the breeze. Undoubtedly, it's an inviting place to come and work every day. But underpinning the immaculate setting and the friendly greetings is a very real sense of purpose – this is where much of the groundwork is laid that is behind the Club's phenomenal success in recent years.

From 1961 to 1999, Arsenal's training facilities were based at the University College of London's Student Union site in the pretty village of Shenley in Hertfordshire. (Prior to that, training was at Highbury itself and took the form of running around the surrounding cinders track or doing a few weights in the stadium gym.) But when the opportunity came up to buy 143 acres of land immediately adjoining the University site, Club officials were quick to seize the opportunity.

Seven years on, Arsenal boast one of the finest training grounds in the world, as facilities manager Sean O'Connor explains: "Even before Arsène Wenger came on board, there was talk of a training ground, but something substantially smaller than what we've got now. When Arsène got involved, he quickly pointed out that the plans we had in place 'were OK for today, but what about the next 50 years?'. His input encouraged us to put something into place, a seed that could grow into something bigger, and to make the investment now as opposed to having it cost a fortune later.

"Arsène sat down with his coaches and asked them what they'd expect to find at the best training ground, or rather what they'd hope to find. Then he went off round Europe with his senior staff and had a look at some of the ideas that were already in place at the best clubs, pulled that together with our ideas and came up with the starting concept of what we now have. We've probably incorporated 90 per cent of what the coaches asked him for, and the proof of its success lies in the fact that we have so much demand from other clubs now to come and see what we have done.

"In the south east we're the leaders at the moment – ourselves, Manchester United, Liverpool and Middlesbrough probably have the best training facilities in the country. England train at least three times a year here and we've also had

Brazil, Argentina, Germany, Ukraine, Sweden, Scotland and the Ivory Coast here. Brazil actually said they were the best pitches they've trained on, anywhere in the world – I've got a letter from their FA saying that. Obviously Chelsea are now beginning to come on board, too, with the investment they're putting into their place, but we're probably five years ahead of them; we're definitely at a stage much further down the line than they are."

There's no doubt that Arsenal made their investment at the right time. "I think the Club have spent about £15 million on the training ground," O'Connor says. "But the value of it now is probably in excess of £30 million. In fact, though, I don't think money could buy it; it's not just the money, it's everything the Club has invested in the ground.

"Of course we're incredibly grateful to UCL for the way they looked after us for 30-odd years. But that was completely different from what we have here now, we're talking two different planets really. There it was really a case of just turning up and using the changing rooms and pitches; here we cater for the whole thing, from preparation for a game to recovery after a game. From the medical facilities, the swimming pools and gymnasium, to the restaurant, with its resident chef, it's completely different from what we had before."

Entering the main building is certainly a slightly surreal experience as all visitors are expected to put on overshoes (think of public swimming pools) to keep it as pristine as possible for a facility which has dozens of young men tramping in and out every day. Even the changing room is clean and tidy as no dirty kit is allowed in there: it's all discarded straight into a vast laundry operation, responsible for cleaning up to 200 kits a day. After progressing through an area set aside for the players to sign shirts, footballs and other memorabilia for charity – cleverly placed so they can hardly walk in or out without stopping for a few signings – you turn left to the state-of-the-art gymnasium.

The gymnasium contains all the equipment you would expect to find, from exercise bikes to multi-station units. There's also a reaction machine on one wall, a combination of lights and buttons which tests the reflexes of the players, and a large warm-up area. The view from the huge gym windows takes in a lake, surrounded by reeds and wild iris, which is home to any number of wildlife. "You can call it feng shui, or zen if you like," O'Connor says with a smile. "But Arsène wanted it to be very easy-going. You want light colours when you're relaxing, colours that are easy on the eye, not fierce reds and the like. Where there are carpets, Arsène had a say in the colours; where there are wooden floors they are sprung and heated. As for the first-team changing room, it's one of the biggest, I believe. A lot of people have based their ideas on what we've got –



even the Millennium Stadium changing rooms are based on ours. Television is, however, one convenience that is not allowed while the players are working out in the gym; indeed despite the impressive nature of the facilities, the manager would rather the players were outside unless they're injured.

Injuries are, sadly, a fact of life for professional sportsmen, but again everything possible has been done to aid recovery. "There's huge medical assistance available," O'Connor says. "We've got Gary Lewin who's one of the best physiotherapists in the country, if not the best, and three other physios under him. There are two fitness coaches and the club doctor, Dr Ian Beesley, previously part of one of our Olympic teams, who spends two days a week here and also travels with the team wherever they go."

The medical unit is located next to the pool area, where a jacuzzi and a steam room, filled with eucalyptus, are available for relaxation, and a hydrotherapy pool for rehabilitation. Perhaps most impressive of all is the fact that the pool has an adjustable floor; it can move up and down from 0 to 1.7 metres depending on requirements. "If you're looking at a player who has a lower body injury, for example, you'd have a fairly shallow pool," O'Connor says. "This gives you resistance similar to, say, running in the sea. If it's an upper body injury they'll take the pool down quite deep so the player is actually swimming, using the floats for resistance. The coaches, fitness coach and doctor can then go below the water line and watch the player's movements through windows in the side of the pool – effectively from under the water. This is an important aspect because if a player is compensating for an injury by perhaps limping or favouring one leg over the other, that could put a week to 10 days on their recovery time.

"Arsène wants players back only when they're 100 per cent fit, not 95 per cent, and the facilities we have here enable us to bring players quickly back after injury, but always in the correct manner – there's no point in rushing someone back from injury and then two weeks later losing them again." Wenger is well known for erring on the side of caution in this respect, so players who might be considered fit at another club aren't at Arsenal, and won't be risked in a match. Of course, players sometimes find this frustrating because they always want to play, but in the long run they are likely to be grateful for the way Wenger looks after them.

Wenger's involvement goes far beyond concern for his players' fitness, however. He was consulted on every aspect of the training ground. "Everything you see, Arsène had a hand in," O'Connor says. "Everything we did, we did as a group and he sat at the table with us and helped us to make those decisions. To take one example – the chairs in the restaurant – I told him we'd located the type of chair we wanted and he said: 'Bring eight different chairs'. And when we did

and lined them all up he sat and tried all those chairs! I looked at him as if to say 'What are you doing?'. He told me he wanted to know 1) that they would last (which is why we didn't go for a wooden chair), 2) that they were comfortable (very important because the guys might be sitting in these chairs for a couple of hours while they're having lunch and a meeting or whatever) and 3) that they're easy to clean and, if need be, to repair. That's the way Arsène was thinking, and that tells me that he knows, firstly, that there is a cost factor, secondly, a life factor and thirdly, and most importantly, a comfort factor.

"What Arsène tries to put into all of us is that we know what's right, but let's discuss it and make sure we're comfortable with everything we're doing. When Arsène Wenger says that, well it tells you something about the man, doesn't it?"

The restaurant where those carefully selected chairs now reside certainly provides a comfortable and relaxing area – in stark contrast to the more functional affairs of yesteryear – as it's light, airy and spacious. There's buffet-style food and drink available between noon and 3pm – courtesy of the head chef and his staff – consisting of the fish, chicken, pasta and vegetables that constitute a modern footballer's diet. Not content with insisting on the right proportions of carbohydrate, fat and protein for his players, Wenger even selected the right type of plate, one with a slight bowl effect to facilitate the eating of pasta.

Travelling abroad, though, presents a new set of complications. "We might well send someone on to scout the facilities," O'Connor says. "In fact, that's how I first got involved with the Club. I have a background in catering, hospitality and building management in the City with firms such as Whitbread and Grand Metropolitan. I was approached with a view to pulling together everything that Arsenal might need for their trip to Dynamo Kiev. The Ukrainians are lovely people, very hospitable, but some of their facilities lacked what a club like Arsenal would require, so me and the chef put together all the food packages, crockery, toilet paper and so on, then arranged all the various licences needed for importing and exporting this stuff. We shipped it all over, then two days later, we shipped it all back again. I loved it, though, so when this facilities management job came up eight years ago, I jumped at the chance to apply – that was a year before the training ground opened."

The first aspect they had to get right was the pitches. "Grass is the most important part of our business," O'Connor emphasises. "Without the grass, everything else falls into insignificance." There are 10 pitches at the ground, two of which have under-soil heating, necessitating some 17 miles of piping, and valued at around £200,000 each. "I'd challenge anybody in Europe to show me a better pitch than what we've got out there," he says proudly. "Some people might think that grass is just grass. Well, let me tell you, grass isn't just grass, not in

this line of work. There are different types of grass and the way you produce it is the way you'll end up producing it on your stadium pitch. To create fast movement and good football in the Arsenal style you need good-quality rye grass, cut to the right length and watered at the right time. And looked after, of course, which is why we have 14 ground staff here to prepare and maintain it that way."

To the untrained eye, at least, the grass looks immaculate and if the players' training is anything to go by, they seem pretty happy with it, too. Training at Arsenal is always done with the ball, at pace, often in short, sharp sessions and is a wonder to behold. It's clear that these young players – and just how young they are is brought home to me when a coach's walkie-talkie buzzes that teenager Theo Walcott's driving instructor has arrived – revel in the whole atmosphere of their superlative surroundings. "That's why the pitches were phase one," O'Connor says. "The buildings were phase two and they're quite technical constructions: there's a load of electronics – from the heating to the ventilation system – then there's the undersoil heating, the gym with all its sophisticated equipment, the floors inside the main changing rooms, which are heated and sprung, and so on."

Phase three was the indoor hall, which was completed later, and is also used by the ladies teams and the Academy students. "There was a bit of a delay," laughs O'Connor, "on account of our finding a couple of unexploded World War II shells on the site. An eight-incher and a six-incher. It was a landfill site during the war, apparently, and it was a very surreal thing when we started excavating because, of course, when you see landfill normally there's usually loads of paper and plastic but on a 1930s/1940s landfill you don't get that, so it's like entering a timewarp. But there was plenty of steelwork, old bikes and wheelbarrows and the like, and in the middle of all that were these two Royal Artillery shells. Made quite a big bang when they went off, they did.

"It caused a few nerves, naturally, and we had to go on a big induction course about the potential dangers. Then we had people come and stand in the hole for a few weeks, watching everything that came out. Still, I guess it was appropriate for the Gunners."

The Club has always had a well-founded reputation for its community links, and these are being extended now the new building is fully operational. "We'll educate 12 youngsters from the local community," O'Connor says. "They'll get a 90-minute training session and 45 minutes of IT training once a week for 24 weeks as part of a little course – rather like the 'Double Club' scheme we had at Highbury. And the full-time Academy boys will be educated there, too. They'll spend two years with us and we educate them three days a week up to 'A' level

standard so they've got some qualifications to fall back on if they don't make it as footballers."

The whole scale of the operation has had to change in the past few years, it seems. "We didn't realise how quickly we were going to take off in the media world after we'd won our first Premiership title. After that, we just went huge," O'Connor says. "Our media facility has become this huge, amphitheatre-style room for the Champions League, with 10 individual interview rooms – and they're full every Friday. That said, there's still a family tradition at this Club, a family spirit. There's a way we do things at this Club and that includes a lot of things which other people just don't seem to be able to copy – they may copy what we do here, pick up on some of our ideas and so on, but they don't seem to be able to copy the way that we do things."

One of those classy touches is that the Club has taken on board its responsibilities to the wider community, not just in the 27,000 trees they've planted, but in employing local labour and in working closely with local schools. All the water that is drained off the pitches is saved and put to use – there are more than 100 carp in the lake, and the whole area is a nature reserve, which is opened up from time to time to a bird society. On the other hand there is an extensive irrigation system which can disperse up to 30,000 gallons of water onto the pitches in about an hour and a half. There's even a public right of way at the top of the ground, which the Club, to its credit, has made no attempt to remove.

"That's right, there is a public right of way," O'Connor says. "We have had to explain to people from time to time that it's a right to cross from A to B, not a right to stop on the middle of the path and try to see what's going on. But it's not near where the first team train, so really we've no problem with it. That said, we did once catch a manager – I'm not going to name him, he's not a manager now, but was quite high profile in the game – in the hedge trying to get a closer look!

"Arsène does like to keep training sessions under wraps, so we have a 'no visitors' policy at training to keep out the people who shouldn't be here, except for press commitments, mainly to do with Champions League games. But it's not just that. The location of where we are, and the proximity of our neighbours, means that we would upset people if we opened up the training ground to the public and that wouldn't be fair on those neighbours. Also, this is a multimillion pound investment we've got here in the team; you can't just let £250 million worth of footballers wander around when there are strangers about – hence the CCTV.

"That said, there are exceptions to our rules on specific occasions. For example, we have a members' day at the start of every season – we had 20,000

people attending one season – and we have what we call our ‘special days’ for the Willow Foundation [the charity set up by Bob Wilson and his wife, Megs], for seriously ill young adults, where once a month we make a training session available and let a group in to watch. We’ll continue to do that sort of thing because it’s vitally important."

Coordinating the different aspects of the training ground operation, including pitches, buildings and staff, is a huge undertaking. But it’s clear that it’s a job in which O’Connor takes an immense amount of pride, and which he relishes. "It is a challenge, yes, but one that everybody likes to rise to. The success of the team on the pitch filters through to us all, and everybody at the Club feels it – if we get to a final, say, we’re all taken along, and we’re even allowed to bring a guest with us, which is good stuff and long may it continue to be like that."

As for the players, you rarely hear of a disgruntled footballer leaving Arsenal because there’s been a problem, much less former players sounding off in the press. "No, that’s right," O’Connor says. "In fact, the most frequent comment we get from players who’ve left the Club when we talk to them about how they’re getting on now is ‘It’s not like Arsenal’. And that’s everybody from the youngsters who leave because they haven’t made it, to those who’ve finished a two or three-year contract with us, to those who’ve spent most of their careers at the Club. That doesn’t mean that their new club lacks professionalism, or anything like that. It’s just that there is an Arsenal way of doing things that isn’t the same anywhere else."

O’Connor can provide all the facts and figures you could possibly want about Arsenal’s spectacular training ground, but the real measure of the Club lies in the way he positively beams about working there. "The biggest thing for us is that everybody who works for Arsenal is proud to work for this Club. Yes we’ve all got mortgages and bills to pay, but we all enjoy what we do. I’m 45, I’ve been working since I was 16 and I know I’m very lucky to wake up in the morning and look forward to going to work: I’m very mindful of the fact that lots of people out there can’t say that. We all work hard here, don’t get me wrong, but we enjoy it.

"When the team is successful, we all feel we’ve played a part in that, from the women who work in the laundry, through to the groundstaff – everybody. The ultimate goal for everybody here is the team, or teams – whether from a commercial perspective or a training perspective, the team have to be doing their best. If they haven’t won, we all need to come together and sort it out, and if they have, well, then, we’ve all played our part. The team have to be doing their best and hopefully winning, for us all to be achieving our goal, which is to make Arsenal the leader in everything – on and off the pitch."

## INTERVIEW

# ***A man of many talents***

Adviser, confidante, travel agent, TV critic – Gary Lewin has filled many roles at Arsenal, but it's as the country's top sports physiotherapist that he's had the biggest impact

"What time's the coach leaving?" "Don't know. Ask Lewey."

"Who's got the passports?" "Gary, of course."

"Where's the boss today, Gaz?" "Now that would be telling!"

You get the picture. Gary Lewin has gained a reputation as the font of all knowledge, as the first port of call when you want an answer. Never mind his expertise in all matters medical, or the fact that he's one of the country's most renowned physiotherapists, Lewin could be relied upon to sort out most problems in the camp, whatever their nature.

Even George Graham was known to lean on him as a ready source of information, inquiring about anything from travel arrangements to kick-off times, from the hotel food to what was on the TV that night. As a result, Lewin became practically indispensable, with his role at the Club somehow extending much further than merely getting players fit for a Saturday.

One of the wives might be having problems with her pregnancy – give Lewin a bell, he'll know the best specialist in town. A young child wakes up in the middle of the night with a raging temperature. For the worried parents, one name naturally comes to mind. Lewin's reassuring voice down the line works wonders every time.

It might sound rather strange, asking a physio for advice when the local GP is on hand, yet that's how it worked for many years. Lewin was the starting point for most inquiries. I'm sure he still is to a certain extent, though things have moved on considerably in the intervening years. In fact, they have changed unbelievably since that day long ago when the young Essex lad was offered the chance to become the Club's one and only full-time physio.

Compare that with today when an impressive raft of highly qualified colleagues supports Lewin. Assistant physios, fitness coaches, masseurs and chiropractors are among those that combine to do the job carried out by one man for seven years. In hindsight, it's difficult to understand how he managed to get by, but get by he did – and then some. Twenty-one years and counting: it's been one heck of a journey, spliced with precious memories from several trophy-laden campaigns. Five League Championships, five FA Cup wins, two League Cups and a European Cup Winners' Cup – they serve only as handy bullet points for a catalogue of tales.



On top of that, there are Lewin's further adventures as England's chief physio to consider. Having held the honour since 1996, Lewin has sat on the bench through every subsequent high and low, ranging from the 5-1 thrashing of Germany in 2001 to getting knocked out (yet again) on penalties at the 2006 World Cup. Mind you, we can't blame Lewin for that. His influence might spread far and wide, but it hasn't yet extended to the job of sticking the ball in the back of the net from 12 yards. All in all, it has been an amazing success story – yet one that started with heartbreak.

Lewin had always wanted to be a goalkeeper and signed apprenticeship forms at Arsenal in 1980. But two years later his dreams lay in ruins following the devastating news that he hadn't made the grade. "It was the end of my world," he says. "For two months I was in cuckoo land."

Two figures, in particular, brought him round to his senses: the club physio, Fred Street, and Alf Fields, a former player who had gone on to work the sponge and was then the youth team's kit man. "They suggested that, instead of going down the leagues to carry on playing, I got qualified in something. I had nine 'O' Levels, so they knew I'd had a reasonable education."

Lewin initially started thinking about a career in the police force or becoming a PE teacher, before another idea cropped up. "Fred suggested I have a crack at physiotherapy. He thought I'd be ideal. He arranged for me to go to a couple of hospitals and I got interested from there," Lewin says

To get the two 'A' Levels required to pursue a degree in Chartered Physiotherapy in those days, Lewin went back to school. At the same time, he started turning out for non-league Barnet, while helping out with the coaching of Arsenal's schoolboys. "I was still only 18. I hadn't given up all hope of becoming a 'keeper, but I thought I might as well get some qualifications behind me in case it didn't work out."

That plan continued apace when he started his degree course at Guy's Hospital in London, and gathered further momentum when he accepted an offer from Roy Johnson, Street's successor at Arsenal, of a part-time job at the Club. As part of his training, Lewin was already helping out on the medical side with the Club's schoolboys and reserves.

Yet it took one more quirk of fate to nudge him all the way. Having graduated from Guy's in June 1986, he spent a couple of months on the wards as he contemplated his next step. Over at Highbury, meanwhile, George Graham was embarking on a brand new escapade. Keen to make a fresh start, one of the Scot's early decisions was to dispense with Johnson. Right out of the blue he offered Lewin the job. "I was only 22. Amazing. It would never happen now."

Indeed it wouldn't. Not at Arsenal anyway, where Arsène Wenger insists on

the very best. In fact, a whole host of things don't happen in the way that they did, including the treatment of injured players. Methods and techniques of treatment are always changing.

"Medicine has gone full circle now," Lewin says. "When I was training it was all about electrotherapy – that kind of thing. We're much more hands-on now, more into biomechanics, muscle tension movements, stretching, manipulation, rehabilitation and prevention. Instead of using ultrasound all the time, we get our hands into the muscle, breaking down the adhesions in the tissues. From day two of the injury we're doing exercises where you're working with gravity to strengthen the muscle. There's a lot more massage, a lot more stretching. Say it's a hamstring tear. We'll work on your back and also with the joints above and below the injury – in this case the hip and knee joints. We run players a lot quicker as well, get them out jogging four or five days after the injury. We never used to do that."

That's certainly true. You could normally count on a couple of weeks on the treatment table, growing more depressed by the day as you watched the lads go out to training and, a couple of hours later, drift back in again, laughing and joking about something that had happened. That was the worst bit – feeling an outsider. That sensation, I'm sure, hasn't totally disappeared in today's cosmopolitan collection of multi-millionaires. For anyone with a shred of professionalism, it must still be a pain to be laid up and out of action. From Lewin's perspective, however, the attitude to injury has become more inquisitive. "These days, players ask a lot more questions. 'Why are we doing that?' 'What's that for?' 'I want another opinion.' 'I want to go back home to see my surgeon.' They are much more aware of their own bodies – and medicine in general – which I think is very good because it means they protect themselves a lot more."

As a result, he believes that the long-term effects of playing football at the top level won't be anything like as bad for today's players as it was for those in previous eras. The relatively new concept of squad rotation plays a central part in this belief. Lewin, in his time, has seen both sides of the coin: the same players being asked to play week after week, often in discomfort, and, more recently, people dropping out with the slightest niggle.

"In the old days we often patched up a player and kept him going until he couldn't play any more. As a result of that, he'd be out for much longer and there was a fair chance that he'd need surgery. Under George [Graham], we might have four or five operations at the end of every season. That doesn't happen now because, with the bigger squads, if you've got a player with, say, a tight hamstring, you don't play him." Wenger, of course, is a genius in the ways

of physiology, in judging when a player is at his physical peak, and can usually tell if something is wrong. "A player might have a tight hamstring, a sore back or whatever and the boss will come in from training and say: 'So-and-so isn't moving right. I think he's got this or that.' You examine the player and Arsène is often right."

That won't come as much of a surprise to the legions of devoted converts out there. As the banner proclaims: "Arsène Knows". So does Lewin, of course. That's why he gets so many phone calls at all times of the day and night. One of the more comical ones came a few years ago. Fast asleep in his hotel room the night before a game, Lewin was awoken by a distressed player's voice. "Lewey, Lewey, I poked myself in the eye before I went to sleep. I've just woken up and it's really hurting. What shall I do?" The reply was simple and to the point: "Close your \*\*\*\*ing eyes and go back to sleep!"

Yet not all cries for help were so easy to solve. There was the time when a half-asleep Steve Morrow staggered to the toilet. "He tripped on the step leading to the bathroom and pulled his calf. Couldn't play the next day," Lewin says. Likewise Anders Limpar, who got injured walking down the Highbury tunnel. "Bruised his toe. We had to pull him out at the last minute."

Unfortunately, not all the injuries Lewin has treated in his time have proved so trivial. One of the worst, in fact, came in his early days in the job. "Charlie Nicholas it was," recalls Lewin. He had to have 20 stitches in a deep knee wound at Nottingham Forest. Another bad one was Ian Selley's tib-fib [tibia-fibula] fracture at Highbury. That was quite nasty."

One well-known problem that always requires speedy attention is the so-called swallowing of the tongue. "The tongue is a muscle, and like all muscles it just flops if you lose consciousness. It flips to the back of your throat and blocks the airway. All you do is release it and clear the airway. It's a very simple procedure, but it's lifesaving, and therefore a fundamental part of your training. It's happened a few times. I remember Rocky [David Rocastle] did it at Millwall once."

How many times in the past 21 years have we seen that – Lewin running on to the pitch, medical bag in hand, and crouching with concern next to an injured player? The only thing that has noticeably changed is the fact that he is wired up these days, a microphone and earpiece enabling him to communicate with the bench. "It just makes things easier," he says. "I can talk to the doctor if there's a real problem or let the manager know if the player can't continue."

And so to England – a role that has been a source of great pride over the years. In terms of physically treating players, on and off the pitch, this task is exactly the same as the 'day job'. Where it differs considerably is on the political

side, making sure that all the clubs are kept abreast of events. "Fortunately I've built up a really good rapport with all the other physios and when we go away, most of them will phone me to talk through any problems. I won't discuss it with them before that point because that would be a conflict of interests. Other clubs have kicked up a fuss about it in the past and there have been a few complaints that I shouldn't work for both Arsenal and England..."

Yet work for Arsenal and England he does. "The only time I ever thought of leaving was when we had a change of manager here and the Club wouldn't give me any guarantee over my future. I was going into the unknown and at the time I had a really good offer from another club." So what happened? "Well, in the end my love for the Club made me stay."

When I ask him to name a highlight, he mentions all the great times: the League Cup semi-final win at Tottenham Hotspur in 1987, the cup wins in 1993, success in Copenhagen the year after, the Double in 1998 and the magnificent unbeaten season. At the end of it all, though, he can't help returning to 1989 and the most dramatic match in the history of English football. Yet it could have been so different. "I don't know if you remember, but Michael Thomas nearly didn't play. He'd come off against Wimbledon 10 days before with a sore medial knee ligament. We'd given him a steroid injection and he was having treatment five or six hours a day. He only trained the day before. I remember saying to George that Mickey was fit to start, but I couldn't guarantee that he'd finish."

The stuff of legend, you might say. The ever-present Lewin dressed in his tracksuit has undoubtedly worked his way into Arsenal folklore. The players even used to joke that he was destined to become the 'new Bertie Mee', by graduating from the treatment room to the manager's office.

That's unlikely to happen, but this physiocum-confidant-cum-fixer-cum-plain good egg has nevertheless proved just as influential in his own way. Lewin is a man of many talents, so to describe him only as a physiotherapist doesn't, in truth, even begin to do him justice.

**Alan Smith**

## INTERVIEW

# **The backroom boys**

**A top Premiership club such as Arsenal requires a whole host of unsung heroes beavering away behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of a well-oiled machine**

Every football club has them – those little-known and often unremarked heroes who graft away diligently below the arc light of fame, happy to do their bit without any fanfares. More a calling than a career for many of them, such unquestioning service forms the lifeblood of a club. It lends colour and warmth behind the scenes.

In this regard, Arsenal have been fortunate down the years, attracting more than its fair share of good-natured souls with the Club's best interests at heart. In giving some examples, any number of people could have been highlighted here. What about Maureen, the tea lady and cleaner, who retired in the summer of 2006 after 25 years' service? Younger types like Sheila and Jo, personal assistants in their time to the manager and secretary, are still going strong behind computer screens. So is Shelley, Ken Friar's secretary, together with Pat O'Connor, an electrician-cum-general handyman.

And then we come to the figures picked out below. David Miles worked his way up the ladder from the lowest possible rung, eventually succeeding Friar as company secretary. Born just down the road in Shoreditch, his love for the Club as a supporter and servant shines through his every word.

Alan Sefton's social conscience and business brain were perfectly suited to forming strong links with the local community. A genuine workaholic, his fertile mind is forever producing fresh ideas, whether that involves devising groundbreaking schemes to improve literacy through football, or bringing people together in stricken parts of the world.

Finally there's a man whose name you won't see listed in any official brochures. Neither does he figure in many Club chronicles. But one thing's for sure: Pat Galligan was as much a part of Arsenal over the years as any manager, player or member of staff. Ask anyone at the Club. For more than three decades, this man from Cork, with an accent as thick as Irish stew, formed an integral part of Highbury's rich fabric.

As a labourer, member of the groundstaff, odd-job man and latterly in charge of the dressing rooms on match days, he was loved by everyone – hence the widespread shock and sorrow when he passed away only a matter of weeks after reluctantly retiring. As if to confirm his place in Highbury's history, the turnout for his funeral resembled a veritable A to Z of Arsenal past and present. On a

rainy day at St Joan of Arc church, a long line of familiar faces joined an already swollen throng. Every figure among them had a story to tell.

Walk into the ground any time of the day and you had a fair chance of bumping into Galligan. If he wasn't busy fixing something, screwdriver in hand, he'd be sipping a cup of tea in the little cubby-hole of a room opposite the main dressing rooms. The players absolutely loved him, from the Seventies crew led by Frank McLintock, right through to the multi-national crowd of the modern day. In fact, whenever a trophy found its way to the dressing room, those smiling Irish eyes were required in the photos. The players wouldn't have had it any other way.

**Alan Smith**

**David Miles – company secretary**

**1971 – present day**

When I was 16, I started in the Club shop working with Jack Kelsey, the famous goalkeeper from the late 50s and early 60s. Jack was a friend of my father's and he asked my dad if I knew what I wanted to do as he was expanding the shop, which meant going from three people to four. I thought I'd try it for a year and see how I felt; 36 years later, I'm still here.

From there I moved into the box office. I remember our ticketing computer broke down one day before a game against Charlton Athletic. We had about 6,000 tickets still to print, which meant we couldn't sell them.

Luckily, Tottenham Hotspur had a similar computer so on the Friday night we took our computer disc over to White Hart Lane, put it in Spurs's computer and printed the tickets right through the night. When we finished at about seven on Saturday morning, we rushed back to Highbury and they went straight on sale. Having worked for about 36 hours flat out, it got to kick-off time and Ken Friar said: 'You look knackered! Go home.' That was one of the few times I've missed a game.

When I later became the secretary, I used to organise the official team photo at the start of the season. It was only in the mid 90s that we actually recruited a press officer; before then the secretary would look after everything like that. It certainly kept me on my toes because jokers like Alan Sunderland and Charlie Nicholas loved to mess about. In those old days the players would train in the gym on Friday, then walk back through the box office, sweat dripping



everywhere, to ask for their tickets.

Match days can be a nice diversion from your usual Monday to Friday tasks, but there are still jobs to be done. I sit in the directors' box next to a Premier League delegate, former pros in the main, who take on a watching brief. There might be a little spat in the crowd and the police move in and remove, say, three people. The delegate might want to know the details, so I get on my two-way radio and find out. Even though I'm watching the game, I'm still keeping an eye on everything that happens around the ground. Like all jobs, there's good and bad times, but I think the good have far outweighed the bad. I've had offers over the years to go to other clubs, but at the end of the day I'm an Arsenal supporter. I can't think of a job I'd rather have.

## **Alan Sefton – head of football in the community**

### **1986 – present day**

Before coming here I was the link officer between the Sports Council and the London clubs, trying to encourage those clubs to get involved in community projects.

I was always having meetings with Ken Friar and one day I put a proposal to him for Arsenal to take advantage of a scheme that was funding the recruitment of 16-year-old school-leavers who could be trained up as coaches to work in the community. After that, they would be much better qualified to find a decent job. Ken agreed, on condition that I came in to run the scheme.

We're still doing that now. We are very active on the community side and as well as conducting our own soccer schools in and around London, we also franchise the business out to separate companies: there are probably about 20 companies at home and abroad who run their own soccer schools under the Arsenal banner.

The Double Club is another initiative I came up with to improve numeracy and literacy in children. A session will be divided into, say, 45 minutes of football coaching in the playground, then 45 minutes of classroom work. We might ask the lads to compose a match report after watching a game on video. We have compiled all sorts of exercises based around Arsenal – anything that keeps them reading, writing and using their brains. The statistics tell us that truancy rates go down because the kids are doing something they really enjoy. At the same time, their reading and writing improves.

We have gone into lots of inner city schools, but we're still only scratching

the surface. In this job you need to have a certain imagination to realise what the power of football can do. We also have various humanitarian projects abroad where we try to use the power of the Arsenal name. At the moment we are heavily involved in social inclusion projects, which earmark at-risk children and use football as a means of reducing that risk. The issue of obesity is something else we can address by advising on diet and generally promoting healthy living through participation in sport.

## **Pat Galligan: groundstaff member and dressing room assistant**

**1978–2006**

I came over from Cork in 1961 to look for work, but it wasn't until the Seventies that I first started working at Arsenal. I came here with a building contractor which was doing all the repairs around the ground. After a bit, Ron Franklin, then the stadium manager, asked me if I'd come and work full-time for the Club. I said I'd think about it, but I knew I would accept because my three kids, well, they just loved Arsenal. I came in the next day and said I'd take the job.

After a while I moved into the little flat in the corner of the West Stand: I asked David Miles for permission and he said I could. I ended up staying there for 20 years.

As part of my job, I used to look after all the kids – David Rocastle, Tony Adams, Mickey Thomas, Kevin Campbell. As apprentices, they used to do work experience with me. I'd teach them how to do a bit of concreting and get them doing odd jobs around the place. When I was working on the pitch and it got a bit boggy, I'd send them all out with forks. They were a great bunch. Merse [Paul Merson] came back recently: we went down the pub to talk about old times. Great days, they were. Tony rang up the other day as well. He was talking about the time we were walking down Highbury Hill and were so drunk that one of us stripped off. The thing is, we couldn't remember which one of us it was!

I loved George [Graham], too. He was really good to me. He would ask me to go up to his place in Hampstead to do some work in his garden. Always did love his plants, George did. I shall never forget the day he invited me to travel up on the team coach for a game at Old Trafford. He knew I'd always supported Manchester United even though Arsenal's in my blood. Took me up there, he did, and treated me like a king. I sat in the dugout all match.

Arsenal's been my life. So many great memories – the times we won cups and celebrated the victories in the dressing room. The boys have been great, they

always made me feel a part of it all.

**14.**

# **A slice of history**

A look at the many people who have shaped the Club, historical landmarks, great goals, Arsenal internationals and the night Highbury staged the Cooper-Ali fight

# Arsenal: the early years

On December 11, 1886, a group of workers from the Woolwich Arsenal munitions factory in South London took to a boggy field on the Isle of Dogs to play a friendly against a team called Eastern Wanderers. Playing under the name of 'Dial Square' (the Club's first ever guise, which was taken from the particular workshop of the munitions factory where many of the team worked), Arsenal's founders started as they meant to go on with a resounding 6-0 win. The scoreline, though, may well be open to debate, as there were no crossbars on the goals, and very few pitch markings.

Elijah Watkins, the team's first secretary, described the pitch on that momentous day: "It eclipsed any pitch I ever heard of or saw; I could not venture to say what shape it was, but it was bounded by backyards for two-thirds of the area and the other portion was ... I was going to say a ditch, but an open sewer would be more appropriate. We had to pay handsomely to have the mud cleaned out of our dressing room afterwards!"

The Dial Square team that day, the first 11 men to represent the Club, were: Beardsley, Danskin, Porteous, Gregory, Bee, Wolfe, Smith, Moy, Whitehead, Morris and Duggan.

The Danskin in that first team line-up was David Danskin, widely regarded as the founding father of Dial Square Football Club, and subsequently of the Arsenal we know today. Danskin, who came from Kirkaldy, in Fife, asked his friends and co-workers at the Woolwich Arsenal to see if they were keen on starting a football team. Enough interest was generated, and when each player contributed sixpence (Danskin added five shillings), they bought a football and the Club came into being.

Two weeks after that first match against Eastern Wanderers – on Christmas Day, 1886 – the players met in the Royal Oak public house, next to Woolwich Arsenal train station, to form the football club. The name Dial Square was immediately dropped in favour of Royal Arsenal. Next they discussed a kit, and it was the team's goalkeeper, Fred Beardsley, who solved this problem. Beardsley, who became a director after his playing days were over, remained with the Club right through to the move north of the river in 1913. He had

arrived in London from Nottingham Forest and he wrote to his former club asking if they could help out with a kit for his new side.

Forest generously sent a complete set of red shirts, and a ball, and the Gunners have worn red ever since (the white sleeves were added, at Herbert Chapman's behest, on March 4, 1933). 'Reds' was the Club's first nickname.

Finally, the Christmas Day meeting needed to find somewhere for Royal Arsenal to play their games. The obvious choice was Plumstead Common – an uneven, hilly, public ground, near to the Woolwich Arsenal building. The first game at their new home – and, therefore, the Club's first official 'fixture' – was a friendly against Erith, on January 8, 1887. A further eight games were played that season, and for the next campaign the Club rented the Sportsman Ground on Plumstead Marshes to play their home games.

It was that season (1887/1888) that they entered the London Senior Cup for the first time. They were defeated in the second round by Barnes, but support for the new Club was growing, and their early progress was rapid. The following season they rented the Manor Ground in Plumstead, and the season after that (1889/1890), they entered the FA Cup for the first time. Their first FA Cup tie was an 11-0 win over Lyndhurst, after which Thorpe and Crusaders were dispatched. Swifts finally ended their run with a 5-1 victory in the fourth qualifying round.

Royal Arsenal were winning trophies though, even in these days before they gained admission to the football league. They lifted the Kent Senior Cup, the Kent Junior Cup and the London Charity Cup – all in 1890. The following year they won the London Senior Cup for the first time, and scenes of wild jubilation followed in Woolwich and Plumstead. After these successes, they moved to the nearby Invicta Ground in Kent, which, in contrast to the Manor Ground, had a stand, terracing and changing rooms.

The side played in front of crowds in excess of 10,000 at this new home, but when the rent was increased in 1893, they bought the Manor Ground, and set about improving it until it had a capacity of 20,000. It was here that the Club stayed until the move to Highbury in 1913.

During their time at the Invicta Ground, the Club, tired of losing their best players, made the decision to turn professional. The move to do so was led by Jack Humble – committee member and goalkeeper – in 1891. Two years later the Club became a limited company, under the name Woolwich Arsenal Football & Athletic Company Limited. The Club were now known as Woolwich Arsenal (although the league referred to them as Royal Arsenal for a further three years). A consequence of turning professional was that they were expelled by the London FA, and played only FA Cup ties, and friendlies against northern and

midlands teams throughout the 1891/1892 and 1892/1893 seasons.

In the summer of 1893 Woolwich Arsenal applied for a place in Division Two of the Football League. Many thought it unlikely that the Club – just seven years into their existence, with a small fan-base and situated in a fairly inaccessible location – would be successful in their application, but it was a good time to apply. Five positions became available as the Second Division was extended from 12 to 15 clubs, and two other sides pulled out. So it was that Woolwich Arsenal joined the league in the same season as Liverpool, Newcastle United, Rotherham Town and Middlesbrough Ironopolis.

Arsenal thus became the first side south of Birmingham to enter the league. It proved to be a groundbreaking move as, not for the first time, Arsenal played the part of trailblazers: their move to professional status led to the foundation of the Southern League.

Woolwich Arsenal's first appearance as a league club came at home, on September 2, 1893, against fellow newcomers Newcastle. It ended in a 2-2 draw in front of a crowd of about 10,000. Walter Shaw shot Arsenal ahead after just 10 minutes, and Arthur Elliott doubled the advantage early in the second-half. They could not hold on though, conceding two goals in the final 15 minutes. The Reds finished a respectable ninth in Division Two that first season, with James Henderson top scoring with 12 league goals and seven more in the FA Cup.

They continued to flit around mid-table for the next couple of seasons as they found their feet in league football. Their lowest finishing position was 10th, in the 1896/1897 season, during which they lost 8-0 away to Loughborough – still the Club's heaviest league defeat.

In 1897/1898 Thomas Brown Mitchell became the Club's first professional manager and he was succeeded the next season by George Elcoat. But it was Harry Bradshaw's arrival in the summer of 1899 that brought about Arsenal's first real spell of success. Woolwich Arsenal were a solid mid-table team in Division Two by the time of Bradshaw's appointment, but within five years of taking over he had guided the Club into the top flight of English football, and the semifinals of the FA Cup.

After 11 seasons of Division Two football, Woolwich Arsenal won their first promotion to Division One in 1903/1904, finishing second, just a point behind Preston North End. The Gunners were easily the top scorers in the division that season, with 91 goals from 34 games. They also had the best defensive record, with just 22 goals against. An eight-game winning streak at the start of the season laid the foundation for the promotion push – a run that included two 8-0 victories. Throughout, their home form was impeccable: 15 wins and two draws.

All but two of the 20 players used that season had been brought to the Club



by Bradshaw, but he left the Club right after clinching promotion, to take over at Fulham, and Phil Kelso, a Scotsman, succeeded him. He guided the side to a respectable 10th position in their first season in the top flight, 1904/1905. Home attendances were impressive, and at one point the Club had more season ticket-holders than any other team in the country.

The following season Woolwich Arsenal finished 12th in the expanded Division One, but the highlight was a superb FA Cup run. For the first time in their history Woolwich Arsenal progressed beyond the second round, making it through to the semi-finals. West Ham United, Watford, Sunderland and Manchester United were all accounted for along the way, before Newcastle United, at Stoke's Victoria Ground, ended the run with a 2-0 win in the last four.

Kelso's men repeated the feat the following season, only for Sheffield Wednesday to win the St Andrew's semi-final. The Gunners went ahead after just 10 minutes, but then lost goalkeeper Jimmy Ashcroft to injury, and Wednesday ran out 3-1 winners. These two cup runs proved to be as good as it got for the Club during their Woolwich days, however, and as the results began to deteriorate, the financial problems at the Club mounted. Kelso resigned, leaving George Morrell to take over, but with little option other than to sell his best players to ensure the Club's very survival.

Woolwich Arsenal never really recovered from the loss of their prominent players, and by 1910 the Club faced bankruptcy.

It was at this time that Henry Norris, later Sir Henry, entered the scene. Norris, a ruthless and skilled negotiator, was chairman of Fulham FC, and remained a director at Craven Cottage at the time when he took over Woolwich Arsenal. Arsenal's current status as a super power in global football can be traced back to Norris – one of the most controversial figures in football in the early part of the last century.

The Gunners had just avoided relegation in 1909/1910, and Norris bought the cash-strapped Club that year with the intention of merging them with Fulham (then of the Second Division). The idea was to combine Woolwich Arsenal's top-flight status with Fulham's superior location at Craven Cottage. The Football League vetoed the suggestion, while the other London clubs then blocked his proposal of Arsenal and Fulham sharing the Cottage. The League then forced Norris to choose between Fulham and Woolwich Arsenal, as they brought in rules to prevent one man controlling two clubs.

He decided on the Gunners, but things were to get worse before they improved.

Woolwich Arsenal did manage to finish 10th in Division One in 1910/1911, and again in 1911/1912, but as a Club they were just treading water. In

1912/1913 the serious problems arrived. Morrell's side finished rock bottom, with just three wins and 26 goals from their 38 league outings. The tally of 18 points was the lowest recorded in the top flight during the whole of the 20th century. By the end of that ruinous season, the Club was reported as having just £19 in the bank.

Drastic times call for drastic measures, and it was at this moment that Norris finally managed to move the Club north of the River Thames. The Club's location in south London had been holding them back for a variety of reasons. Served by poor transport links, the Manor Ground was also prone to frequent flooding and, in comparison with other London clubs, the local fan base was poor. And so it was, in early 1913, that Norris identified a six-acre plot of land at St John's College of Divinity, Highbury N5, where he intended to relocate the Club.

The hard work was just about to begin for Norris, though, who faced fierce opposition from other London clubs (notably Tottenham Hotspur, Orient and Chelsea), from Highbury residents, and even from the Club's own fans. But Norris was a shrewd and influential man, with contacts in all the right places. He eventually overcame every hurdle. An FA inquiry set up to investigate the proposed move ruled that the opposition clubs had no right to interfere, presumably because the FA committee looking into the affair consisted of many of Norris's associates. Next Norris used his contacts in the local media to help win over (or at least silence) the dissident voices among the Highbury public. The final step was getting the Church of England to sell the land, which they did, for £20,000, when another of Norris's friends – the Archbishop of Canterbury – personally signed the deed.

As part of the 21-year lease, Norris had agreed that no games would be played at Highbury on 'holy days' and that no intoxicating liquor would be sold inside the stadium. Just over 10 years later, when the stadium was purchased outright for £64,000, the prohibition of games on Christmas Day and Good Friday was dropped.

The stadium itself, designed by Archibald Leitch, had one main, two-tier stand, on the east side, holding 9,000 spectators, and terracing on the other three sides. It was a far cry from the Manor Ground. Both geographically and metaphorically, the Club had come a long way under Norris.

The first game at their new home, on September 6, 1913, resulted in a 2-1 win over Leicester Fosse, with goals from George Jobey and Andy Devine proving enough to get the Gunners off to a winning start in North London.

On April 3, 1914, the Club dropped Woolwich from their name, and Arsenal went on to finish third in Division Two that season, missing out on promotion

only on goal average.

Promotion was only one year away, though, and Arsenal Football Club have never again plied their trade outside football's top flight.

# Our Highbury home

Highbury opened in 1913, and was continually modernised and developed right up until the Club moved out in 2006. The original stadium was designed by renowned Scottish architect Archibald Leitch, whose football CV at that time included the likes of Ibrox Park, Stamford Bridge, Ewood Park, Goodison Park and Old Trafford. Known as ‘Football’s Engineer’, Leitch was a man in demand, and the Arsenal chairman Henry Norris duly appointed him to turn the six acres of playing fields at the St John’s College of Divinity into a football stadium, hiring a building company – Humphreys Ltd, civil engineers of Knightsbridge – to turn Leitch’s vision into reality.

Before building work on the actual stadium could begin, though, the pitch had to be levelled out. It is estimated that about 200 workmen were required for this task, which entailed lowering the south end by five feet and raising the north end by about 11 feet. The original Arsenal Stadium had its main stand, which held 9,000 spectators and had a multi-span roof, on the east side. (A similarly designed roof can still be seen at Carlisle United’s Brunton Park.)

In keeping with many of Leitch’s other designs, the other three sides of the stadium consisted of terracing, which were formed by large mounds of mud and rubble left over from the excavation of the new Piccadilly Underground line. The slope at the north end of the stadium would become Highbury’s most famous terrace, though originally it was called the Laundry End, after the steam laundry behind the ground in Gillespie Road. It did not become known as the North Bank until the 1960s.

The stadium was finished only just in time for the start of the 1913/1914 season, and the venue was far from ideal in those early months, with much of it still resembling a building site. In truth, construction had been somewhat rushed, but the Club’s directors had grand plans and pleaded for financial help from the fans to enable these plans to come to fruition. To that end, shares and season tickets were sold, and eventually most of the terracing was covered. The Club invited the fans to suggest a name for Arsenal’s new home. Among the proposals were Avesbury Park (a hybrid of Avenell Road and Highbury), The Fortress and The Gun Park. In the end, though, the venue was officially christened The

Arsenal Stadium, although locals almost universally referred to it as ‘Highbury’ for the next 93 years.

As for their development plans, Arsenal were not initially in a financial position to make the required, drastic alterations to the stadium. The freehold of the site was purchased in 1925, and steadily increasing attendances meant the Club could begin serious redevelopment work in 1931. The terracing at the south and north ends was enlarged, and the foundations laid for a new West Stand. Legend had it that a tradesman’s carthorse fell to its death in the foundations at this time, and was buried where it lay on the North Bank. But despite the myth surviving down the years, no horse remains were found when the old North Bank was demolished in 1992.

The old North Bank was also the original home of the famous Arsenal Clock. Installed at the behest of manager Herbert Chapman, the clock proved a controversial addition to the stadium, as the FA would not allow a 45-minute timepiece to be on display, so a regular 12-hour clock was agreed on. When the North Bank was roofed in 1935, the clock was moved to the opposite end of the stadium and hence the south stand, until then referred to as the College End, became known as the Clock End.

It was the new West Stand, though, that would be the main talking point. Arsenal appointed another Scottish architect – Claude Waterlow Ferrier – who teamed up with William Binnie, to design the iconic, art deco West Stand. It was officially opened by the Prince of Wales on December 10, 1932, and at the time was the largest, most advanced grandstand ever seen in this country. Costing £50,000, the double-decker stand held 21,000 spectators, 4,100 of whom were seated. The finished stand – 70 feet tall and 315 feet long – also incorporated three flats.

At about the same time, the playing surface was completely remade, with a practice pitch added behind the south stand. In 1936, a year after Chapman’s death, the impressive new East Stand replaced Leitch’s rapidly fading original stand. Ferrier also died in 1935, but Binnie, his architectural partner on the West Stand, ensured that the East Stand was completed in similar style to the West Stand, yet on an even grander scale. Indeed, the East Stand was a masterpiece, incorporating offices, a broadcasting box, players’ facilities and of course the famous Marble Halls.

No detail was overlooked in construction. The floors of the dressing room were heated, and the luxurious walnut panelling on the boardroom walls remained in place until the Club moved to a new office block in 2006, when the panelling was transported to the Club’s new headquarters. The magnificent East Stand was opened on October 24, 1936, giving Highbury an official capacity of

more than 50,000 (the stadium's record attendance was 73,295, set on March 9, 1935).

Just three years later, the outbreak of World War II led to Highbury becoming an ARP (Air Raid Precautions) centre for the next few years, and Arsenal's wartime matches would be played at White Hart Lane. Furthermore, Highbury suffered bomb damage several times during the war, and the North Bank was rebuilt in 1946.

With league football resuming after the war, Highbury was home to a substantial innovation in the early 1950s – floodlit football. About 20 years after erstwhile manager and football visionary Herbert Chapman had first suggested it, floodlights were used to illuminate the playing surface at Highbury for the first time in a friendly match against Hapoel Tel Aviv on September 19, 1951 when 1,500-watt lamps were fitted along the East and West Stand roofs, where they were to remain for the next 55 years.

Many more improvements were made to Highbury over the next 20 years or so. In 1963 the training pitch at the south end of the stadium was roofed, while undersoil heating was installed the following year and in 1969, 5,500 more seats were installed in the West Stand. Very few other major changes were made to the stadium until the 1980s, the next being the redevelopment of the Clock End, which was completed in 1989. This overhaul involved converting the south area of the stadium into a commercial complex, including 48 executive boxes, new office space, restaurants, conference rooms and a modern sports hall. A small car park, for the players to use on a matchday, was situated under the sports hall, and by 1993 the stand was all-seat.

Also in 1989, the award-winning Highbury pitch was completely re-laid. It was the last time the surface underwent re-laying, making it the oldest pitch in the Premier League by the time the Club relocated. The 1990s saw Highbury redeveloped to come into line with the Taylor Report in the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster. With stadiums around the country obliged to become all-seat by August 1994, a new North Bank stand had to be erected. The last game in front of the old North Bank was in May 1992 – Arsenal beating Southampton 5-1. The terracing was then ripped down, and while the work was in progress, a giant mural screened the building site.

The new state-of-the-art, spacious North Bank stand, with a capacity of 12,262, was opened in August, 1993, a full year ahead of the deadline. As part of the stadium's remodelling, supporter entrances were redesigned, and many of the East Stand offices were refurbished, as were the changing rooms and boardroom – although very much in keeping with the original designs.

Other changes to Highbury since then ensured that the building served its

purpose as a modern sporting arena fit for one of Europe's biggest clubs, while also staying true to its traditional roots. These included the addition of two giant 'Jumbotron' television screens – in the south-east and north-west corners – a new television gantry and modernised dugouts. By the time it hosted its final game, in May 2006, Highbury had a capacity of 38,500.

Arsenal moved to Emirates Stadium that summer, and almost immediately, work started on the Club's former home to turn it into 711 executive apartments. The East and West Stand facades are being retained, ensuring that the new development will reflect the spirit of Highbury for generations to come.

## INTERVIEW



# **Highbury's family affair**

**Continuity has always been Arsenal's policy. The boardroom is no exception to that rule, as reflected in the Hill-Wood family's association with the Club over three generations**

The Hill-Wood dynasty is part of the fabric of this celebrated Club: Peter, the present chairman, succeeded grandfather and father, providing continuity in a link stretching back to the foundation of greatness under Herbert Chapman in the 1930s. If Arsenal maintain an element of traditional dignity and stability, this is at least partially because of the equanimity of their present, unostentatious leader. He was not to be found blowing trumpets – which was never his style anyway – on behalf of the Club when they reached the Champions League Final in 2006, even though he regarded it as "the most significant challenge the Club has ever faced". It was just one more milestone in a history punctuated by such achievements.

Though Arsenal were to lose 2-1 to Barcelona, their first final in the European Cup could not have come at a more opportune moment, with the imminent move to the impressive new Emirates Stadium. "The move was very emotional," Peter Hill-Wood reflected. "When the new season started, my family's connection with the Club had lasted for over 80 years and it's a proud association. My first visit was just after World War II, coming with Sir Samuel, my grandfather, when I was a teenager. We would leave his central London home for the ground at two o'clock, after lunch – there were not the traffic problems in those days. In mid-winter it would be earlier because there were no floodlights. Night fixtures at Highbury always had a special feel for me, and it was particularly pleasing that our final floodlit match at Highbury brought a memorable victory over Villarreal to carry us into the Champions League Final. Another special night for me was in 1970 when we beat Anderlecht to win the Fairs Cup after some years in the wilderness."

Part of the stability and dignity of the Club arose from the policy of in-house appointments, as initiated by the family: George Allison, managing director, succeeded Chapman; legendary trainer Tom Whittaker succeeded Allison; and he in turn gave way to Jack Crayston, who was replaced by George Swindin, both former players. When Billy Wright, the famed former Wolverhampton Wanderers and England captain, failed to deliver as Highbury manager, Denis Hill-Wood gambled on the appointment of another back-room physiotherapist, Bertie Mee, who would, in five years, win the domestic League and Cup Double. After Mee came a former Arsenal player, Terry Neill, then another, Don Howe,

who in turn was succeeded by George Graham, a further Highbury old boy. Whether they got it right or – occasionally – wrong, the principles of the boardroom, led by the chairman, were predominantly sound, basing their decisions, where possible, on continuity and familiarity with known good men.

Sir Samuel had become chairman in 1929, at a time when Sir Henry Norris was suspended from football administration following a lengthy inquiry into alleged financial malpractice. Samuel had changed his name from plain Mr Wood after a row with his brother. It was their father who, in Derbyshire, had established the family wealth, and Samuel had always taken a strong interest in sport. He had twice won the Waterloo Cup for hare-coursing, ran a pack of hounds, was a first-class shot and, though a small man, had played rugby league. His chief distinction was – when playing cricket for Derbyshire at Lord's in 1900 – to score 10 runs off one ball, a feat which still holds a place in *The Guinness Book of Records*.

Peter, if asked, will reflect that the family originated "from humble yeoman stock", and have ridden good times and bad with unfailing equanimity. Samuel was a benefactor of the local Glossop FC, the smallest town ever to host a First Division club. At substantial personal cost, he underwrote the club for the benefit of the local mill workers who helped comprise the moderate attendances. Retiring to London and joining the Arsenal board, Samuel sensed that the Club needed to raise its social image: the Earl of Lonsdale was invited onto the board for starters. At the same time, Samuel brought to football administration a significant change in emphasis. He felt that it was the manager's job to manage, without interference, until such time as the board might consider he needed replacing, and this policy was to be upheld by son and grandson.

Ken Friar, who joined the Club after World War II as junior assistant to the then-general secretary Bob Wall (later succeeding him and rising to the position of managing director), has vivid memories of an elderly, Victorian-style chairman. "Sir Samuel may have been small in stature, but he was nonetheless impressive, with a benign attitude to all those with whom he dealt. I was a mere kid, the lowest of employees, but whenever he passed me within the Club it was always 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon' – courtesy itself."

It was Sir Samuel who would elevate Whittaker to the hot seat in 1947. When he died in office, he was succeeded by Sir Bracewell Smith, a onetime Lord Mayor of London who had made his fortune in hotels, including the Ritz, as well as being chairman of Wembley Stadium and Earl's Court Exhibition Hall. Sir Bracewell, who was also from the north, Keighley in his case, had been encouraged by Sir Samuel as an increasingly dominant figure in the boardroom, though Peter recalls: "I don't think he understood the *game* in the slightest bit.

He'd come a long way, and enjoyed the status." Sir Bracewell would frequently become irate, and there is the amusing tale that, in a fury over some issue, he banged on the table, pushed back his chair and toppled backwards on to the floor. Thereafter, the chair had a fifth leg added to its rear, and continues to be used to this day by the current chairman, and can now be found residing in the new boardroom in offices adjacent to Emirates Stadium.

Sir Bracewell died in 1951 and was succeeded by Denis Hill-Wood, an able wing-half for amateurs Clapton Orient, down the road from Highbury, having been a double football and cricket Blue at Oxford. There he had met and retained a powerful dislike of fellow undergraduate Harold Thompson, a whizzkid scientific academic who would later rise, as Professor Sir Harold, to be chairman of the Football Association.

Denis had played at Clapton alongside a young George Male, and the story goes that he was telling Chapman about the irreplaceable value of Male to the amateur team, only for Chapman to steal him for Highbury within the fortnight. Denis could hardly complain: Male was to become one of the most formidable defenders in Arsenal's history, while such was Denis's estimation of Chapman that he later offered, with hindsight, the opinion that "he would have made a brilliant prime minister – just consider what he did, building new grandstands, buying the best players, changing the way the game was played". Today Peter reflects: "My father spoke of Chapman in the most glowing terms. It was such an outstanding period: the team was powerful in every department – defence, midfield and attack, though that wasn't so different from what has happened now under Arsène Wenger."

Denis, though understated in manner, was much more involved than either his father or Sir Bracewell in the day-to-day running of the Club, without ever being intrusive. "He was brought up with Arsenal in his veins," Peter recalls, "and he had a very clear view of how we should progress and how we should play. It was, of course, so very different in those days at board meetings, where everyone agreed with whatever my father suggested. Yet Father was never a dictator; he was very straightforward, wholly without guile." Friar especially remembers Denis Hill-Wood's magnanimity: "He was one of the most honest men you could meet. If a decision was taken at a board meeting in the interest of the Club, the chairman would ask how the decision might affect, say, Rotherham United or Scunthorpe United, and would be reluctant to take decisions which might be detrimental to smaller clubs. I've been there when he's turned something around having considered the wider picture. He was imbued with fairness."

In the matter of hiring and firing, Friar reflects that Denis could handle any

situation, good or bad. "Having been a tank commander in the Balkans, where he was awarded the Military Cross, little in normal life unnerved him, and it was rare for him to be put out. I think the only time I saw him cross was when Bob Wall increased the price of the programme without reference [to him].

"Denis could be ironic, though," continues Friar. "When Terry Neill was rather too pleased with winning the first two matches of the season, Denis observed 'Yes, only another 40 matches to avoid relegation'. He also had little time for politicians." His dislike of Harold Thompson was enduring. On the day of the FA Cup semifinals in 1978, when Arsenal defeated Orient at Stamford Bridge, and Ipswich Town beat West Bromwich Albion at Highbury, John Cobbold, the Ipswich chairman, and others were having a drink afterwards in the secretary's office when Thompson put his head round the door and was promptly told by Cobbold to \*\*\*\* off. Denis, on hearing of the incident, promptly instructed Friar to send Cobbold a case of champagne.

It had fallen to Denis to dispense with the services of George Swindin in 1962, amid a continuing spell of mediocrity, and in his second year the new chairman gambled on the appointment of Billy Wright, almost wholly on the strength of his character and playing reputation. Peter, a young new member of the board, was as taken with Wright as was his father: "We were all incredibly fond of him; you couldn't meet a nicer man. He had no real coaching experience, so I suppose it was a gamble, but everyone had great respect for him. He did turn out to be not a very good man-manager – for some strange reason he seemed to upset the players, which we found very surprising. I don't think he disciplined those who stepped out of line, and the dressing room became a bit of a rabble. It was with great reluctance that Father decided he had to get rid of him. It was not a sudden knee-jerk reaction; Bill had lost control, but the board didn't want to do the dirty on Bill at all. A day or so after the announcement, Joy Beverley, Bill's wife, rang Father and began to give him a bit of a blast. And I heard Father say 'Joy, before you go on any further, I think I've saved Bill's life for the future, so calm down a bit. Trust me, I think we've done the right thing, for him and for us'.

"We both remained very good friends with him. While he was manager, we'd had more fun with him on a personal basis than is possible nowadays. He was such good company, even though it became blatantly obvious he wasn't made to be a manager. I got some wind of this when playing golf with Don Howe while on tour in South Africa in 1964; I got the drift that tactically all was not well. I was the director in charge alongside Bob Wall, and we had a hilarious time, playing golf and, I suppose, drinking too much. In those days it was much more relaxed; it's so different with the players nowadays, when they drive off after a

game in their own Bentleys."

After not too long deliberating – the intention was obviously there before Wright's dismissal – Denis gambled again, though this time with the sounder basis of insider knowledge. Bertie Mee, like Whittaker, was lifted from the bowels of the physio room. "I think Father and I have always been of a mind that if you know the person, it's less of a gamble than if you've merely interviewed someone two or three times. Yes, it was an exact repeat of the Whittaker move. We all knew Bertie very well: I think some of the players thought he was a bit of an old woman, but he was a sound man-manager. He may have been a little bit of a sergeant-major, but he knew enough about the game, and though he was not necessarily tactically the best in the world, he got the players playing to the best of their ability. He and Father got on extremely well. What we needed at that time was a steadying hand, and we didn't have any doubt that Bertie could do something, though we had no idea he could become as successful as he did.

"Contrary to public perception, Bertie wasn't quite as straight-laced as he presented himself. After a couple of glasses of wine, he really became quite chatty, and had a good sense of humour. His bringing in Don Howe as coach was pretty vital, though Bertie was very much the boss; indeed he could be a very bossy little man, but I was extremely fond of him. He wanted to win, and I have to say I was pretty happy with the way we played. In any club, if you're winning, as long as they're not kicking lumps out of the opposition you don't terribly mind how they do it. You can't always have the luxury of knocking in three or four goals a match. I felt we played some pretty good stuff under Bertie. True, the team hadn't got the talent of today's players, but they didn't half work for you. They'd have died for Bertie, for the Club, and that says something about his leadership."

Sad to say, Mee's star dipped below the horizon sooner than might have been expected. There followed an abortive attempt to bring in the first prominent foreign coach to a British club in the person of Miljan Miljanic, a Serbian from the then-Yugoslavia, who had been notably successful with Red Star Belgrade and Real Madrid. Miljanic was much fancied by Denis on account of his war-time experience fighting alongside the Yugoslavs, but instead Terry Neill was enticed away from neighbours Tottenham Hotspur. "Miljanic was a very impressive man," Peter says. "My father was really enthusiastic about the idea that he should join us, it would have been a revolutionary move within the English game. In the event, it was laudable that Miljanic decided he should be true to his word to Santiago Bernabeu, Real's president: that he would continue for another year even though he was not under contract, and had been told by Bernabeu that he was free to join us if he wished.

"Instead, Terry Neill was a fairly obvious choice. He'd been an Arsenal man, and we thought he could be successful, though it didn't turn out quite that way. He did pretty well getting us to three consecutive Cup Finals and maybe was unlucky in the League," Peter says.

Neill's appointment was made by Denis, but when his reign fell into decline, it was the task of Peter, never one to step into the spotlight, to bite the bullet. He admits: "I didn't much enjoy the job of telling Terry we had to part. After he left, he wrote a book about his time with us, and was rather rude about me. I attended the publisher's book launch, and gave Terry a bit of a surprise when I went up to him and said I had no hard feelings, and would like him to sign a copy. He has been coming to Highbury quite often and we've stayed on good terms, yet I did feel at the time that he wasn't quite made for the job."

Succeeding Neill was Don Howe, formerly coach under Bertie Mee, who had since gone off in pursuit of driving his own chariot. He was to last only a couple of seasons, however. "Don and Terry were two nice men, neither of whom, in my opinion, were quite up to the job. Don was a born number two, and what he really enjoyed – and did so well – was coach; when he subsequently came back in that capacity, he had great satisfaction." The respect was mutual. "After Denis died," Howe recalls, "Peter was very supportive. It's the Arsenal way. They let you get on with the job, they back you all the way. There are not too many board meetings, whereas at some clubs they have a board meeting every week. At Highbury, you'd enquire, and learn the next board meeting was in two months' time. And they never used to last much more than half an hour; it was marvellous for a manager. Certainly there was never any pressure on me, and I know from talking to him that it was exactly the same for Terry."

Then came George Graham, a return to winning ways and high celebration, concluded by an abrupt, demeaning end. It was much regretted by the chairman. "I got on so well with George, and the ending was very sad," Peter reflects. "We used to meet for periodic lunches at the Savoy Grill; he was always very open, and I liked him. Yes, I suppose his tactics could be infuriating to the rest of the world, to the extent that he was very defensive. This didn't endear us to others, but George would be furious when we conceded a goal. Yet at the time he arrived, we needed to establish ourselves, and I was not opposed to his tactics at all. Certainly, I prefer the way we play under Arsène Wenger, it's much more fun to watch and when we're successful it's a delight, though we do leave the door open at the back too often. But at the time we appointed George, I was right behind his methods. What he did to bring about his downfall was very silly indeed, and I'm sure he regrets it."

Even if George Graham, though on the most handsome of salaries, did regard

himself as being insufficiently rewarded for the success he brought to Arsenal – not excluding a substantial return on the balance of transfer fees – it was an acute embarrassment, for a club with Arsenal's reputation, to have to dismiss someone for having improperly accepted bonuses through an agent. The *principle* was far more hurtful within the Highbury boardroom than the sum of money involved, notwithstanding that the Club have always had something of a reputation for being careful with the level of salaries it pays. That, the boardroom would claim, has been no more than prudence.

With Graham's departure there was a period of uncertainty which, following the briefest spell of affairs under the direction of Bruce Rioch, culminated in the appointment of Arsène Wenger. As chairman, Peter had been in a state of mental ambivalence: knowing that Arsenal were at a crucial stage of development, under pressure from Manchester United, but at the same time being of a more conservative mindset than his father, he was less inclined to gamble. Publicly, he had conceded: "There is no doubt in my mind that we are blinkered and backward as a sporting nation." He was aware of the difference between taking a chance, and being progressive. In the approach to Wenger, he was party to the whole action, though he seldom featured in media reporting of the event, which predominantly gave the credit to vice-chairman David Dein.

"The original suggestion came from David," Peter recalls, "who said he'd like me to meet Arsène. We had dinner and I liked him very much, but then I got slightly cold feet about having a foreign manager. I admit that 10 years on, that seems laughable, but at first I said no, I didn't think it was the right time. This was before Wenger had moved from Monaco to Grampus 8 in Japan. When Bruce Rioch did not work out very well, I said to David that I felt that we ought to try again with his friend Wenger. So three of us flew to Japan, David and I and the major shareholder, Danny Fiszman – who also prefers to stay out of the limelight. We interviewed Wenger, who said he couldn't join us until the completion of his contract in Japan. Quite proper. As everyone knows, his joining us has been an absolutely outstanding event. What he's done for us has been a miracle. He's very wise, very straight, and he has a different approach from a lot of managers. He doesn't talk a great deal, but the players respect him highly. We wouldn't swap him for anyone in the world."

All was not instantly bathed in a golden glow, and there were some queries at the AGM of 1996/1997, with awkward questions about Wenger's appointment and, more pertinently, allegations that the Club had paid over the odds, through an agent's involvement, in the transfer of Dennis Bergkamp from Inter Milan, a signing concluded while Rioch was still in charge. On these occasions Peter is a slightly contradictory figure: on the one hand representing the oldworld



gentlemanly nature inherited from his predecessors; on the other having a businesslike brevity which treats the shareholders with courtesy, but tells them little more than he thinks it is essential for them to know. Since most speakers at shareholders' meetings wish to hear only the sound of their own voice, Peter's manner largely finds approval and confident acceptance. He is not cut in the mould of high-powered executives, such as those who now dominate the world of, say, television companies, but is an old-money banker, transparently trustworthy and representative of all the honourable traditions of the game and of his Club.

Discussions with Wenger on the purchase of new players are never complex. "The conversations are basically about how much he likes a particular player and what is his estimation of the player's worth," Peter says. "Arsène has always known that we couldn't spend £25 million on someone; he's often said it's no good him spending that kind of money if it was going to bankrupt the Club. Unfortunately for the game, that's not an attitude all managers take. Arsène understands the finances of the Club probably better than we do. He gives a measured view. I just can't imagine life without Arsène. He never gives us a sleepless night. He's loyal, and of course we would extend his contract if he wishes. You age in that job, seven days a week, but he still enjoys the day-by-day involvement with young players. If he wants to stay, it's up to him." Another instance of laid-back chairmanship.

The observations of Friar reveal the quiet authority and integrity of the present chairman: "He has similar traits to his father; you will never get anything shady past him. It has run through the family – he has inherited it. There's a picture in the boardroom of him with his grandfather when he was about 15. While on the one hand he doesn't suffer fools gladly, he's the last person to seek promotion for himself. The investors love him for his lack of pomposity: the simple way in which he relates the facts. But on the other hand he understands that it's necessary never to be too close to a manager, because Peter recognises that sooner or later the day will arrive when it's his responsibility to say 'Sorry, we have to part company'. How long will he continue? I don't know. He's conscious of the need for the Club to maintain its tradition of credibility, and at the moment there's no natural successor."

The last word goes to Peter: "Leaving Highbury was a wrench, but I knew it had to come. I've put all the sentiment behind me. It was hard to accept, but for a long time we'd been studying how we could maximise our opportunities in the market place. With a 38,000 capacity stadium, we couldn't compete with Europe's top clubs. We still won't be able to compete with Roman Abramovich, but we'll be on a par with the Italians and the Spanish. Season tickets went well,

with a long waiting list and with space for 60,000 spectators, good football should fill the stadium, though we haven't budgeted for that."

**David Miller**

# Highbury goals: the top 25

So what makes a great goal? Or to put it another way, what constitutes a classic, the kind of strike that will be remembered for many years to come? More to the point, what qualities are required, with specific reference to this task, to make the final cut in our definitive list of Arsenal's greatest Highbury goals?

The answer, in truth, is a mixture of all sorts, though it has to be said that the issue of importance carries a lot of weight. A strike doesn't have to be spectacular (though admittedly that helps) as long as it means a great deal in the context of the day. I am talking in part about goals that changed the course of events, influenced a cup or a title in Arsenal's direction. It could be a scruffy tap-in or a sensational 20-yarder – what's important is the timing and the ramifications.

That said, a stunning effort on its own with no implications at all is by no means barred from entering this roll call: aesthetic beauty always counts for a lot. A moment of magic in complete isolation, a flash of brilliance in a sea of grey to cheer a lifeless campaign – they stand the test of time with many supporters. On this theme, you could argue for the inclusion of countless efforts. Of those that didn't quite make the grade, what about Charlie Nicholas's cheeky chip against Chelsea one day when he nutmegged Doug Rougvie out on the touchline before finding the net from fully 35 yards?

Who is to say, for that matter, that John Jensen's one and only goal for Arsenal after 98 games of trying shouldn't go in? They still wear the T-shirts at Ashburton Grove: 'I saw John Jensen score'. It was a beauty, too – a curler from the edge of the box to send Highbury wild. Joe Baker, on the other hand, wasn't quite such a stranger to the scoresheet. Might he, therefore, merit a mention after totting up 100 goals over four seasons? After all, stunning ratios like that don't come along every day. Just a pity in this case that the flamboyant striker's time in North London during the Swinging Sixties didn't coincide with any silverware.

Already it's obvious that this kind of list is open to objections. The subjective aspect can't be ignored. Goals are about opinions, taste and, most importantly, memories.

Where were you, for instance, when Thierry Henry embarked on that thrilling solo run to break Tottenham Hotspur's spirit in 2002? In the North Bank perhaps? Up in the East Stand? Or even listening on the radio from the comfort of home? It does make a difference. Personal recollections tend to colour everyone's choices.

By the same token, some tales are passed down through the generations. For example, many people reading this book would not even have been born when Charlie George lashed home an unstoppable drive to break Newcastle United's resolve in 1971.

Going further back, granddads still talk about Jimmy Logie's goal against Burnley which effectively clinched the League Championship in 1953. As for pre-war escapades, unfortunately it gets increasingly difficult to hear first-hand anecdotes, to find wizened veterans who can remember the legendary exploits of characters like David Jack and Jimmy Brain, Ted Drake and Cliff Bastin. Yet those eras must be acknowledged, arguably in more depth than any other period, for without the stunning success of the 1930s, in particular, Arsenal would not be the Club that it is today.

So in compiling this catalogue of memorable goals, due deference is paid to those early years, as it is to every other era that met with success.

It's not easy, you know, whittling down 4,039 first-class goals to a mere 25, sifting through 93 years of achievement to settle on a handful. Yes, I know, your heart bleeds at the thought. Who wouldn't fancy this mouth-watering job, rolling back the years to unearth some classics? In truth, I had an absolute ball trawling through the archives to study the goals that shaped the great institution that is Arsenal Football Club. Here comes the list. Feel free to disagree.

**Alan Smith**

**George Jobey v Leicester Fosse**

**September 6, 1913**

Highbury resembled a building site more than a top-class sporting arena when it opened its doors for the first time. The previous few months had proved a mad rush following the Club's bold decision to leave the Manor Ground in Plumstead.

Even so, a large enough crowd of 20,000, a mixture of followers from south-east London and curious locals, turned up to justify the contentious move. They

were soon to be disappointed, though, when the impudent visitors, with no sense of occasion, took an early lead through Tommy Benfield. Not to be denied, Woolwich Arsenal (they would drop the prefix the following April) fought back, grabbing an equaliser just before half-time when George Jobey created his own slice of history with a timely header.

Jobey would later be carried off injured and, due to the sparse facilities on site, had to be transported away on a milk cart for treatment elsewhere. But while Archibald Devine's late penalty gave 10-man Arsenal the win (no substitutes allowed in those days), it was Jobey who would be remembered for that first goal.

The Geordie striker couldn't possibly have known what he had started. Another 4,037 Arsenal goals followed before Highbury bowed out with Thierry Henry's penalty against Wigan Athletic on May 7, 2006.

## **Charlie Buchan v Liverpool**

**September 12, 1925**

One of the most famous transfer arrangements in football history saw Charlie Buchan return south from Sunderland in 1925, having briefly played for Woolwich Arsenal as an amateur some years before, only to leave after an argument over expenses of 11 shillings.

When Arsenal came calling again, Sunderland initially asked for £4,000, but when that sum was declined an agreement was reached whereby Buchan's former club received £2,000 straight away plus £100 for every goal the player managed to score that season. Yet when Buchan's first four outings came and went without reward, people started to wonder if he was trying hard enough. "That big fellow couldn't score if you gave him the Bank of England!" one fan was heard remarking on the Tube.

The Liverpool game, however, marked a change in fortune. Midway through the first half, left-winger Sammy Haden cut inside for a shot on goal. Liverpool's goalkeeper, it seems, made some kind of a save but couldn't stop the ball from gently rolling goalwards. Just to make sure, Buchan tapped home from under the crossbar. The ball may even have crossed the line before he got there. No matter. Buchan claimed the goal and Sunderland got their money. Another 20 goals followed to leave them in credit.

## **David Jack v Aston Villa**

**April 1, 1933**

Arsenal were well on the way towards securing their second title of that golden decade when David Jack scored a goal so remarkable, so improbable, that it reportedly left Highbury momentarily stunned.

Taking a pass from Alex James, Jack set off on a run that would take him 50 yards. Yet incredibly, in beating five players on an astonishing dribble, the inside-forward only touched the ball four times. Just inside the Villa half, he dodged Joseph Beresford with a subtle body swerve before doing the same to the approaching Jimmy Gibson. Alexander Talbot and Thomas Smart came and went quickly, leaving Fred Biddlestone in goal as the only remaining obstacle. As the keeper dashed out to narrow the angle, Jack feinted to move to his left before rolling the ball home with the outside of his right foot.

## **Ted Drake v Sunderland**

**September 18, 1937**

This strike encapsulated Ted Drake's power, his sound technique and his keen concentration. In drilling home a low drive from the righthand side of the Clock End penalty area, Drake displayed his goalscoring prowess.

Sunderland were the victims that day, but, in truth, it could have been anyone. You couldn't keep Drake down. He was a magnificent centreforward, with a goals-to-games ratio that even Thierry Henry can't match. Three years before this particular strike, his 42 league goals in a season have never since been threatened, nor have his seven at Villa Park in one match, a Club record that still stands.

## **Eddie Carr v Liverpool**

**April 30, 1938**

Going into the Easter programme, a long run of good results had eased Arsenal three points ahead of their closest rivals, Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Unfortunately, that holiday period proved a disaster for George Allison's side, a goalless draw at Birmingham in between home-and-away defeats to Brentford. Worse still, at Griffin Park, Tom Whittaker famously had to carry off a half-conscious Ted Drake. The Gunners wouldn't be able to count on their prolific centre-forward for the run-in.

Step forward Eddie Carr, a 5' 7" stand-in who responded magnificently to the challenge at a time when his team couldn't afford any more slip-ups. A brace in the next game at Preston North End was followed a week later by the only goal of the game at home to Liverpool.

The importance of that strike could not be over-stated, not when Wolves went into the final day still one point ahead. Just for good measure, Carr added another two in an easy romp against Bolton Wanderers – a result that proved sufficient to clinch the title for the fifth, and final, time that decade.

Seven goals in 11 appearances represented a fine effort. Cruelly, however, Carr didn't play enough games to receive a championship medal.

## **Denis Compton v Burnley**

**February 11, 1950**

Head down, left leg extended in textbook fashion, Denis Compton rifles home the second goal in a 2-0 win. This fifth-round tie safely navigated, Arsenal went on to lift the FA Cup with Denis, for a change, playing a central part.

Heavy commitments for Middlesex and England meant that this hugely talented allrounder played a lot more cricket than he did football. Over the course of 15 years (though war admittedly intervened), Leslie's younger brother managed to rack up only 60 firstclass appearances for the Gunners. Five of those actually came in this Cup run when the glamorous star's exciting wing-play formed a key feature of the side's progress.

Yet four days after the final at Wembley (a 2-0 victory over Liverpool), Denis would turn out for Arsenal for the very last time, a persistent knee injury persuading him to concentrate on cricket. Though rarely a regular, the famous 'Brylcreem Boy' had certainly done his bit.

## **Jimmy Logie v Burnley**

**May 1, 1953**

It was the day before the Cup Final and Highbury was packed. The players of Preston North End, Arsenal's only remaining rivals for the League title, had departed already for an end-of-season tour, their fixtures complete after beating Tom Whittaker's side seven days before.

Arsenal's position was clear: they needed a win to put them level on points. After that, some maths would be required. Yet Highbury fell silent after three minutes when Joe Mercer put through his own goal. The title, at that point, seemed to be heading for Deepdale. Taking the bull by the horns, Arsenal stormed back, finding the net three times, first through Alex Forbes, then Doug Lishman and finally Logie.

Though Burnley replied, the home side determinedly hung on to get the result they required. Logie's close-range finish had been absolutely crucial. Arsenal won the League on goal average – 1.516 to Preston's 1.417.

## **George Eastham v Bolton**

**December 10, 1960**

To say the least, it had been a long wait. A bitter wrangle with his previous employers, Newcastle United, meant that George Eastham had been out of action for a full five months when he eventually made his Arsenal debut.

Yet it wasn't so much the fact that this skilful inside forward grabbed a welcome brace on that December afternoon, rather the unusual circumstances of his contentious move south. When the Tyneside club refused a transfer request, Eastham withdrew his labour, effectively going on strike to set in motion a course of events that led to the abolition of the maximum wage and, in time, the scrapping of the old 'retain-and-transfer' system.

Parallels with Jean-Marc Bosman can be rightfully drawn. A determined, single-minded character, Eastham blazed a trail for every modern day player by sticking to his guns and changing a set-up that heavily favoured the clubs. In notching two against Bolton, he certainly helped to win this match. Much more than that, though, Eastham's return to action marked the beginnings of a power shift that would change the game forever.

## **John Radford v Anderlecht**

**April 28, 1970**



As one of the noisiest, most electric and thrilling nights at Highbury, the second leg of the Fairs Cup Final, ended in chaos, thousands of fans swarmed on to the pitch. Charlie George, for one, had his shirt ripped from his back during the delirium that followed the clinching of Arsenal's first trophy in 17 years.

While many factors contributed to this rousing victory (you can point to Frank McLintock's rallying call after the first leg in Brussels, or Ray Kennedy's late header that night, which gave the team hope), it was John Radford's second-half header here that finally nudged the hosts ahead on the away-goals rule.

As a result, this could arguably be termed the most important of the forward's 149 goals in an Arsenal shirt. Much less spectacular than Eddie Kelly's stunning opener, it was a standard header by Raddy's standards, the kind he'd snap up countless times in his career.

Nevertheless, it helped end the long wait to banish the ghosts of the past and set the Club up for what was to come – the Double.

## **Charlie George v Newcastle United**

**April 17, 1971**

It was a goal that captured Charlie George at his very best, swaggering around in search of the main chance. The long hair, the strut, the violent whip of a shot – this was Charlie in full swing at the start of the Seventies.

Newcastle, what's more, had proved stubborn opponents in a game that wouldn't be remembered for its poetic beauty. But with 19 minutes left, and Arsenal desperate for the points to keep up their title charge, a rare flash of excitement settled the affair. When Peter Simpson launched a long free kick into Newcastle's box, Bobby Moncur's clearing header didn't get much distance. Seizing on the loose ball, George tried a snappy one-two that didn't come off, the ball bouncing off a defender instead and back into his path.

There was nothing else for it. Now on the edge of the box, Charlie launched himself at the chance to lash home an unstoppable effort into the far corner. Continuing his run, the scorer rushed to salute his people, his muddied shirt sleeves riding up those long, skinny arms.

Leeds United, meanwhile, were falling at home to West Bromwich Albion in a blaze of controversy, a defeat that left Arsenal top of the table. Many would look back on this day as a turning point.

## **Eddie Kelly v Stoke City**

**May 1, 1971**

Imagine the nerves at Highbury that day. After an arduous slog through winter and spring to get within touching distance of capturing the title, Arsenal knew that nothing but a win would do, not with Leeds back on top of the table after a 1-0 win over the Gunners at Elland Road.

And like many home games during that run-in, it proved dreadfully hard going for the most part. Stoke's five-man midfield came primarily to stifle and frustrate. If this made the task difficult, the tension in Arsenal's play only compounded matters.

On came Eddie Kelly to begin a memorable week. The 20-year-old Scot had been on the pitch only 12 minutes when he exploited the potential of George Armstrong's long ball into the box. A George Graham flick to Radford was steered into Kelly's path and the substitute pounced to blast in the only goal of the game. Back in the dressing room, Arsenal's task became clear. Next stop: White Hart Lane, and a date with destiny.

## **Malcolm Macdonald v Newcastle United**

**December 4, 1976**

Think of Malcolm Macdonald in an Arsenal shirt and, for many, the same image crops up: an icy day at Highbury with former club Newcastle United in town. A hat-trick by Supermac put his old team-mates to the sword only a matter of months after coming south.

All sorts of things had been said in the buildup to this game. For a start, United's manager Gordon Lee unwisely predicted that his old player wouldn't score. With that particular red rag fluttering in front of him, the bull charged out of his cage with nostrils flaring to gore his opponents in a 5-3 thriller.

For some reason, the third goal, especially, seems to stick in the mind. Overlapping Geordie Armstrong, Trevor Ross gallops up the right flank, gets to the by-line and stands up a cross at the far post.

There waiting is Arsenal's new hero, who, by this stage, is well and truly in the groove. From a standing start, Macdonald times his jump perfectly to squeeze a thumping downward header inside the post whilst flattening his

marker at the same time.

The arms shoot up in triumph, the barrel chest sticks out. Watched by millions on *Match of the Day* that night, it turned into an image that seemed to define the era.

## **Liam Brady v Leeds United**

**August 19, 1978**

Arsenal might have ended up only drawing on this opening day of the 1978 season but, by scoring both goals, Liam Brady kicked off his own campaign in pretty fine style. In fact, a season that climaxed with the dramatic FA Cup Final win over Manchester United would see Brady amass 17 goals in all, his best total for the Club.

This one, what's more, proved one of the best, perhaps second only to an almost identical strike at White Hart Lane four months later. Brady's exquisite curler that night won Goal of the Season whereas this one merely helped to gain a solitary point.

When Leeds United defender Paul Hart lost possession just inside Arsenal's half, Malcolm Macdonald took up the baton to carry the ball forward. Spotting Brady to his left, the striker slipped a simple pass into the Dubliner's path. With the visiting defence backing off, 'Chippy' emerged from the shadow of the West Stand to dribble directly at a weary-looking Paul Madeley. That's when the magic came. This mercurial midfielder cut across the ball with the outside of his left boot to send a shot spinning towards the far post.

The goalkeeper's grasping dive proved nowhere near enough. A Brady classic had hinted at the excitement to come.

## **Alan Smith v Norwich City**

**May 1, 1989**

Modesty was going to prevent any such inclusion, yet the circumstances involved really do merit a mention. The Hillsborough tragedy had cast a dark cloud over all of football. Distraught, Liverpool immediately suspended their fixtures, including the vital game against us at Anfield. Out of respect, we followed suit.

So it came to pass that a 16-day hiatus existed between our last game and this, a tricky tie against a team that had led the League until Christmas, only to implode in the final weeks.

Taking to the field felt rather strange. The atmosphere was subdued, with no one quite sure how to behave. Yet once the first goal went in, Highbury came alive, in celebration of football as much as anything else. Our second, the first of my two, was probably the pick of the five that flew in that day. Having managed to control a sky-high John Lukic punt, I decided to spin and have an instant crack. Catching it perfectly, my left foot volley on the turn fairly rocketed into the corner.

Unusual for me – to score from so far out. It was doubly pleasing that it marked my return from a fractured cheekbone. And so we moved on. While a few twists and turns remained, that win would go down as hugely important.

## **Anders Limpar v Liverpool**

**April 20, 1992**

A nondescript season like this didn't really deserve such an outstanding goal, but that's what it got thanks to the impudence and skill of one Anders Limpar.

It had long been clear that Arsenal weren't going to retain the title, so with nothing to lose and the end of the season in sight Liverpool succumbed to some free-flowing play.

Picking up the ball in his own half, the little Swede scurried diagonally across the halfway line. Liverpool's defenders didn't see the need to close him down, as the winger hovered 50 yards out with little in the way of options. Bad mistake. Glancing up quickly, Anders spotted the goalkeeper's slightly advanced position and drove a beautifully flighted effort over his head, the ball hitting the net without touching the ground. Highbury rejoiced in a moment of magic.

## **Ian Wright v Everton**

**August 28, 1993**

Route one football? Maybe, but of the very best kind. David Seaman started it with one of his long kicks forward. Kevin Campbell got involved with an attempt to flick it on, succeeding only in occupying a defender as the ball flew

over both of their heads.

Time to stand aside. The main man had arrived. Latching on to the loose ball, Ian Wright juggled it to the left with his right foot, then to the right with his left as Matt Jackson, the Everton defender, was turned inside out.

On the right-hand side of the box now, Wright finally let the ball bounce. With Jackson coming back for more, he had to move quickly. Most would have gone for power with a straight forward volley but not Ian, not when something more imaginative was on.

The resulting chip was both delicate and delicious, floating over the head of the stranded Neville Southall. It was beautiful, outrageous, and typical of Wrighty.

## **Kevin Campbell v Paris St Germain**

**April 12, 1994**

While a defiant 1-1 draw in Paris had done most of the hard work, Kevin Campbell's glancing header finished the job off. Thanks to a watertight back four, we negotiated the rest of the night in relative comfort to ease through to the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup.

Sadly, this second leg of the semi-final saw Ian Wright get booked, meaning the striker missed what would become a wonderful night in Copenhagen. Close to tears on the pitch, he was absolutely distraught in the dressing room at half-time. Someone found him in the bath crying his eyes out. Somehow, he calmed down in time to do a thoroughly professional job during a second half in which David Ginola and Co, try as they might, couldn't find a reply to Kevin's close range header from Lee Dixon's cross.

The third European final in Arsenal's history was waiting just round the corner and Campbell had played a hugely important part.

## **Dennis Bergkamp v Southampton**

**September 23, 1995**

It had been only six league games – what amounted to a month without a goal – yet already some doubt was beginning to spread. Was this delicately talented Dutchman really suited to the cut-and-thrust of the Premiership?

By way of an answer, Dennis Bergkamp chose a gloriously sunny afternoon to let everyone know. With one short backlift, with one devastating release, the angular blond burst out of his shell. Audibly relieved, Highbury stood as one to acknowledge a new hero. The next decade would come to include plenty more of the same.

When Tony Adams slid a short pass over the halfway line, Bergkamp, sensing he had room to manoeuvre five yards in from the right-hand touchline, turned to have a run at Southampton's defence. With Ray Parlour peeling off like a Red Arrow, the man in possession was heading only one way, twisting a backtracking defender this way and that before moving the ball on to his right for the lavish coup de grace.

Dave Beasant in goal was left grasping at thin air as a fiercely struck drive from 20 yards out swerved away to the right of the goal and shook the side netting. Brilliant. Unstoppable. Bergkamp had arrived in fitting style.

## **Dennis Bergkamp v Bolton Wanderers**

**May 5, 1996**

It might not seem too auspicious compared with more exotic Champions League fare of late, but at the time, qualifying for the Uefa Cup was regarded as a coup at the end of Bruce Rioch's one and only season in charge.

Dennis Bergkamp's long-range effort in the dying minutes of the last game therefore went down as the most important of his 16 that term. Arsène Wenger would soon be on his way over from Japan. A new era beckoned and European football simply had to be part of the package.

Bergkamp, taking a ball from David Platt, who had equalised minutes earlier, was given far too much room in the middle of the park by a tired Bolton Wanderers defence. Seizing on this charity, the Dutchman turned and steadied the ball on Highbury's bobbly surface before lashing in a screamer from the edge of the 'D'.

## **Ian Wright v Bolton Wanderers**

**September 13, 1997**

He had been planning it for ages. The T-shirt was ready, the champagne was on

ice, a possible celebration no doubt worked out ... Arsenal's goalscoring record was unbearably close. All Wright had to do now was take the final step, a task that had become annoyingly difficult in the weeks leading up to the big day.

When it finally came, though, it was probably the easiest goal Ian Wright had ever scored out of the entire 179 now gathered in his collection. A tap-in from two yards? Surely records were meant to be broken with more spectacular efforts than this.

Dennis Bergkamp's run had just kept going and going, ending with a stretch and a poke that rebounded off the Bolton goalkeeper. An even longer leg belonging to Patrick Vieira now had a go at finding the net. All the Frenchman could manage, though, was a soft jab that rolled right into the path of Arsenal's number eight.

Cue wild celebrations, nothing rehearsed, apart from the shirt being pulled over the head to reveal a message from our kind sponsors. '179, Just Done It!' Cliff Bastin's total, unsurpassed for 81 years, had been overtaken by a man born to score goals.

## **Tony Adams v Everton**

**May 3, 1998**

'Would you believe it?' screamed the commentator Martin Tyler. Well no, since you ask, not many of us would have believed it. Certainly not the day Tony Adams was sent to jail for a drink-driving offence. Or the day he humbly admitted to an alcohol problem. Lesser characters might have caved in altogether, never mind branching out to become a more expressive footballer.

Come a long way? You bet he had, hence the priceless look of pure contentment on those familiar features after lashing home the fourth in this championship jamboree.

Steadying himself, Tony's left leg swung into action, the net bulging before the goalkeeper could move. What a moment it was, one of the most memorable Highbury had ever witnessed: Arsène Wenger's new Arsenal in the throes of evolution being pushed on to glory by one of the old school.

Adding to the romance, Tony's partner of old, the indomitable Steve Bould, had set up the chance with an almost Hoddle-like chip. 'Did you see the back spin I put on it?' Bould joked afterwards. Everyone laughed. It was just too perfect to be true.

## **Thierry Henry v Manchester United**

**October 1, 2000**

When Gilles Grimandi rolled the ball in to his compatriot's feet, United must have felt pretty secure. Thierry Henry, after all, was standing with his back to goal on the right-hand edge of the box with the reliable Dennis Irwin jostling him from behind. With all bases seemingly covered, a simple lay-off looked the likeliest option.

Yet Henry, as we know, doesn't always do 'simple', not when he is capable of producing the stuff of schoolboy dreams. It is difficult to say for sure that he always intended to shoot – the striker may have just been trying a little nonchalant flick by way of holding up the play – but when his touch saw the ball spin up slightly to the left, Henry's razor-sharp instincts led in only one direction.

Swivelling on the spot, the World Cup winner caught the ball beautifully with his right instep before Irwin could move to swipe an unstoppable volley that flashed over the helpless Fabien Barthez and into the far corner.

As the only goal of the game, it was a fitting way to separate these warring heavyweights. As a way of ending a seven-week dry spell it was difficult to beat.

## **Thierry Henry v Tottenham Hotspur**

**November 16, 2002**

North London had to wait only 13 minutes to see this derby explode. The Goal of the Season was about to come their way.

Picking up a bouncing ball a good 20 yards inside his own half, Henry juggled it briefly with thigh and boot before accelerating away in search of possibilities, shrugging off the half-hearted challenge of a flagging Matthew Etherington.

With white shirts backing off, the Frenchman soon found himself on the edge of the box. Feinting to shoot with his right, he shifted the ball to his left. The North Bank, by now, had risen as one, sensing something special was happening below. They were right.

Reserving some energy for the final flourish, and with Stephen Carr and Ledley King reduced to helpless bystanders, Henry drew back his bow, took aim



and ruthlessly found the bullseye with a measured drive into the bottom left-hand corner. Wheeling away, the goalscorer sprinted manically back up the pitch as far as he'd come, this time saluting a riotous West Stand before skidding on his knees, coming to rest totally spent.

"I couldn't breathe for 10 minutes," he would later admit. You couldn't blame him. This spectacular effort was totally breathtaking.

## **Thierry Henry v Liverpool**

**April 9, 2004**

Denied a place in the FA Cup Final by Manchester United, mugged by Chelsea three days later at the quarter-final stage of the Champions League, Arsenal's season was tottering on the verge of complete collapse.

A side that would soon become known as 'The Invincibles' was starting to look uncommonly mortal, an impression that gained credence when Liverpool reached the break of this Good Friday epic leading 2-1.

Most of Highbury fell silent during that interval. Could it be that the scintillating football produced so far was going to count for nothing come the end of the season? But the team reappeared bristling with intent to produce 45 minutes of exhilarating stuff.

Leading the charge was Thierry Henry. Having already scored in the first half and helped to set up Robert Pires right after the break, this mercurial striker struck again a minute later to swing the bout irreversibly Arsenal's way.

Picking up the ball just inside Liverpool's half, he set off on a run that left two players trailing. Sweeping into the box, Henry's cool finish belied its huge importance. Though his hat-trick followed, that second goal had steadied the ship at a vital time. Come the end of the contest, the title was in sight.

## **Thierry Henry v Wigan Athletic**

**May 7, 2006**

The last goal ever scored at Highbury: fitting that the Club's all-time leading scorer should be handed the privilege. Yet Thierry Henry's penalty to make it a hat-trick also felt significant in the context of the day. With word yet to come through that West Ham United were beating Spurs, a two-goal cushion here

certainly calmed a few nerves.

Knowing they had to better Tottenham Hotspur's result at Upton Park to claim the final Champions League place, Arsenal stood on much safer ground when their captain coolly converted from 12 yards out to make it 4-2.

The striker sank to his knees to kiss the turf fondly, a gesture, in itself, that got everyone wondering. Was this a sign of undying loyalty to Arsenal in the face of Barcelona's persistent interest? Or was it just a final farewell to the old ground? Whatever the meaning, Henry would soon pledge his allegiance to North London. Highbury had witnessed nearly 6,000 first-class goals. Looking back, this one must feel the most poignant of all.

# For Club and country

Do supporters of the Club hold a player, any player, in greater affection if he also represents his country? It is a difficult question to answer. We're not talking about admiration here, but genuine affection, which, in my opinion, is more important. It is affection, particularly, which helps a supporter identify with his or her club, and identity is, above all, the factor which exerts such a grip upon a regular public audience.

Occasionally, affection extends beyond local boundaries. The Manchester United team which so memorably defeated Arsenal 5-4 at Highbury immediately prior to the Munich crash had earned, in their youth, a national affection, something quite different from any admiration for their trophy-winning deeds under Matt Busby. Likewise, the Arsenal team, in the years following World War II, generated a national affection for a side led by veteran Joe Mercer, never mind that he was by now too old to be recalled by England.

Being an international, then, probably does add to appreciation by the home crowd, though that status is not essential. Ronnie Rooke was adored at Highbury – arriving as a veteran from Fulham to help transform the team with Mercer – despite never playing for England. Ted Drake, a pre-war hero and the bravest man who ever pulled on an Arsenal shirt, was limited by injury and by the war, as Mercer was; Drake made just five England appearances, a woefully inadequate return for a man of his talents.

There is also, in my opinion, some difference in affection between those playing for a British country and those representing a foreign country – a proliferation in modern times. For example, there is a distinction, I believe, in the esteem surrounding Tony Adams, with his 66 England caps, and Dennis Bergkamp, who won 79 for Holland. In the mind of an Arsenal supporter, the success or failure of Holland is of peripheral concern. When Bergkamp distinguished himself in the World Cup or European Championship, there would be admiration among the Highbury faithful, but it did not *matter* in the way Adams's fortunes with England did. A football fan's emotions are simultaneously subjective and objective. They care in a quite different way if a player is *theirs* – that is British. Bergkamp or Henry were loved when they

excelled for Arsenal. When they shone with Holland or France, they were merely admired.

Nowadays, of course, almost the entire playing staff at Emirates Stadium are foreign international players. It is a status virtually taken for granted. Whether Kolo Touré excels for Ivory Coast is by the by: what matters is what he does for Arsenal. I think the change in social demography among the leading English clubs has altered the way in which players are perceived, and I would say the game is slightly the poorer for it. When Freddie Ljungberg, such a devoted servant to the Club, eventually retires from the game and, possibly, returns to live in Sweden, he won't be held in quite the same regard as, say, David Seaman, 75 times England's goalkeeper.

During Arsène Wenger's management there have been well over 30 international players on Arsenal's books. It goes with the appointment, so to speak, and thereby becomes less of a distinction. Mart Poom, onetime reserve to Jens Lehmann, has kept goal more than 100 times for Estonia, yet how many considered that when buying an Arsenal season ticket? Writing as someone who has been following the fortunes of Arsenal for more than half a century, I do not think the international status of a player will ever carry quite the same meaning as it did in years gone by.

## **The Thirties**

Although Charles Buchan was a foundation stone of team-building in the era of Herbert Chapman, his six England caps were all won before he travelled south from Sunderland. The four men who were to appear most regularly for their country during Chapman's reign were Eddie Hapgood and George Male – arguably the best pair of full-backs England has ever possessed – alongside the goal-scoring winger, Cliff Bastin and, for Wales, wing-half Bob John. Between 1931 and the outbreak of war, Hapgood appeared 30 times for England, Male 19, and Bastin 21, scoring 12 goals.

Conspicuously missing from this group, of course, is the incomparable Alex James. Until the latter part of the 20th century, when Scotland became glad to enlist anyone from south of the border who might enhance their declining performances, they exhibited a level of hostility to anyone deigning to join the ranks of English clubs – and this has applied even to such notables as Frank McLintock, who won a mere six caps, and Jimmy Logie (one). At other clubs Dave Mackay and Denis Law were caught in the same way. Absurdly, James earned only eight caps, four each with Preston North End and Arsenal, never

mind that in 1928 he had been part of that glorious team which defeated England 5-1 at Wembley. Former international Ivan Sharpe called them the Wee Blue Devils in his match report and wrote that James "was the mastermind of this clockwork forward line", which included Alan Morton, Hughie Gallacher and Alex Jackson.

Preston had reluctantly released James – this arbitrary regulation would continue for another half a century – and it was their refusal to do so the following season that partially opened the way for Chapman to persuade the little genius to join him at Highbury. In those days, the British high-handedly remained aloof from FIFA, refusing to participate in the first three World Cup tournaments, in 1930, 1934 and 1938, so that the fame surrounding Bastin – a goal-scoring winger more devastating pro rata even than Tom Finney, was denied the scope available to, say, Ian Wright in the Nineties. Bob John, meanwhile, was as redoubtable in midfield for Wales as he was for Arsenal.

## **The Forties and Fifties**

International distinction in the post-war period – and I'm talking about those with 15 or more appearances, for that is approximately the figure at which a player can consider himself "established" – was largely confined to defenders, three of them Welsh. Laurie Scott, however, played right-back for England for 17 consecutive matches under the management of Walter Winterbottom, until the even more immaculate Alf Ramsey, from neighbours Tottenham Hotspur, took his place, in 1948/1949.

Scott was very much the old-fashioned fullback, his duty being to defend, though like Ramsey he was an able player on the ball. His style of play was not dissimilar from that of left back Walley Barnes, captain of Wales and another in the gentlemanly mould then readily identifiable with Arsenal: the type of player who was embarrassed if he inadvertently kicked an opponent. Then there was Jack Kelsey, who had the exceptional record of keeping goal for Wales 41 times out of a possible 44. His career was brought to a premature end by an injury incurred when playing against Brazil in Sao Paulo in 1962 during a friendly which preceded that year's World Cup in Chile. Kelsey played 327 league matches, helping to secure the league title in 1953, and together with Dave Bowen (19 caps) was one of the stars in Wales's passage to the World Cup quarter-finals in 1958. Bowen, the captain, was inspiring throughout the five matches and at times in the quarter-final against Brazil – which was lost only to a fluke goal by Pelé – Kelsey was defying the opposition almost single-

handedly.

Never enjoying comparable publicity was Joe Haverty, a diminutive winger who played 32 times for the Republic of Ireland, 15 of them while at Arsenal, including the two World Cup qualifiers against England in 1957. On his day, Haverty had the touch to go past any full-back.

## **The Sixties**

This decade belonged, as an international player with Arsenal, primarily to George Eastham, the playmaker who won his historic legal battle for the right to leave Newcastle United for Highbury, and came so close to being a member of the team that won the World Cup.

In December 1965, in an England friendly against Spain in Madrid, Eastham and his Club colleague Joe Baker, a dazzling striker who won three of his eight caps while with Arsenal, so demoralised the home nation in a 2-0 victory that it seemed Alf Ramsey had struck upon a World Cup-winning attacking formula. It was not to survive, Eastham ultimately relinquishing his role on the left side of midfield to Martin Peters, though he scored in the friendly against Denmark while on tour immediately prior to the opening World Cup tie against Uruguay. Ramsey's preference veered away from the erratically spectacular Baker towards Roger Hunt, Jimmy Greaves and/or Geoff Hurst.

Though Arsenal were struggling to reassert themselves in the League, their full-back partnership of Jimmy Magill and Billy McCullough regularly appeared for Northern Ireland – 26 and 10 times respectively – though the duo were unable to help sustain Billy Wright's uncertain managerial career at Highbury. Magill was the stronger of the two, a conspicuously hard tackler. They would be joined on many sorties with Northern Ireland by Club colleague Terry Neill, who would ultimately surpass them both, winning 59 caps (44 of them while with Arsenal). George Graham and Frank McLintock, on the other hand, seldom received the nod from the Scotland selectors.

## **The Seventies**

The arrival of World Cup whizz-kid Alan Ball at Highbury from Everton in 1971 presaged continuing glory for Arsenal following their Double, yet with neither England nor Arsenal was expectation to be fulfilled. Of Ball's 72 caps, 19 came while with Arsenal, but together with midfield hard-man Peter Storey he shared

in Ramsey's nadir, the 2-0 defeat in a World Cup qualifier in Poland in 1973: a match that was also to prove the end of the road for Bobby Moore. Ramsey, stung by the previous year's elimination in the European Championship quarter-final by West Germany at Wembley when using three ball-players in midfield (Colin Bell, Martin Peters and Ball), came unstuck when controversially dropping striker Mick Channon in Chorzow in preference for Storey. It was the downturn for Ramsey, too, and in less than a year he was gone.

Meanwhile, the always-moderate fortunes of Northern Ireland were on the rise – thanks in part to a new pair of Highbury full-backs, Pat Rice and Sammy Nelson, who would share a hundred caps between them. In 1972, Northern Ireland recorded their first win over England in 15 years, defeating them at Wembley with the only goal, near the end, from Neill. Three years later they held England to a goalless draw in Belfast. In goal had been that man of action more than words – Pat Jennings, then with Tottenham Hotspur, but arriving at Highbury in 1977 and continuing to represent his country for the next eight years while amassing a total of 119 appearances.

## **The Eighties**

Kenny Sansom, with 77 of his 86 caps earned while at Arsenal, Graham Rix and Tony Woodcock were central figures during Ron Greenwood's managerial reign with England. Sansom, the most accomplished left-back for England since Ray Wilson almost 20 years earlier, was an automatic choice throughout the Eighties, a decade in which England too often fell disappointingly short. Rix, an artful left-side player, was competing for his international place with Trevor Brooking from West Ham, the easygoing Brooking being slightly the more refined player. With Brooking injured, Rix took his place for the crucial second-round World Cup tie against Spain in 1982, a goalless draw in which England wasted their chances.

In Greenwood's oscillating selection up front, the blond, quick-footed Woodcock earned 18 of his 42 caps while with Arsenal. In 1982 he was vying for a place alongside Trevor Francis and Paul Mariner, though in that disappointing match with Spain, all three of them played as Kevin Keegan was injured.

Viv Anderson, who had become the first black player to appear for England's senior international side when playing for Nottingham Forest, earned 16 of his 30 caps while with Arsenal between 1984 and 1987. A quick, intelligent, stylish player, he was a regular for three years under the management of Bobby Robson,

before giving way to Gary Stevens of Everton prior to the European Championship finals in Germany in 1988. There England, including a young Tony Adams at centre-half, suffered a miserable string of defeats against the Republic of Ireland, Holland and Russia.

A snappy wing-half at Highbury at this time was Peter Nicholas, who was tough and capable of covering the whole pitch, but unable to secure a regular first-team place at Arsenal. For Wales, however, he earned 73 caps (17 of them while at Arsenal). He was one of seven youngsters to have come through to international level from the coaching school of Terry Venables at Crystal Palace, where Nicholas had been a contemporary of Sansom's. When he arrived at Highbury, the then-manager Terry Neill tended to use him wide on the right, which did not suit him.

With more talent but lacking conviction and self-discipline, another Nicholas – Charlie of that ilk – should have gained more than his 20 caps for Scotland between 1983 and 1989. He was part of Alex Ferguson's squad for the World Cup in Mexico in 1986 when he had a goal disallowed in the opening tie against Denmark, was omitted against West Germany and was brought on as substitute in the goalless draw with Uruguay – a match Scotland had to win if they were to progress. For club and country, Charlie Nicholas delivered so much less than promised.

Liam Brady, on the other hand, was busy using his wizardry – alongside his Club colleagues, defender David O'Leary and Frank Stapleton, a robust, articulate striker – to raise the horizons of the Republic of Ireland. In October 1978 they held England to 1-1 in a European qualifier in Dublin – with Brady's free kick leading to a Gerry Daly equaliser – only to lose 2-0 in the return at Wembley. Ten years on, and the Republic were meeting England four times in under three years: first defeating them in the European Championship in Stuttgart, then drawing three times in succession: in the World Cup first round in Cagliari, then home and away in European qualifiers. By now, however, Brady's impact had lessened, his presence often wasted by the long-ball strategies of manager Jack Charlton.

## **The Nineties**

The unfortunate Adams suffered from that European Championship calamity in Germany, in 1988, and the central defensive positions for the next three seasons were predominantly occupied by two from Des Walker (Nottingham Forest), Terry Butcher (Ipswich) and Mark Wright (Southampton). Adams returned to



favour when Graham Taylor took charge in 1992, and remained a regular contender until the turn of the century, enjoying a powerful partnership with Sol Campbell at the 1998 World Cup and subsequently with Club colleague Martin Keown.

During Adams's absence, Lee Dixon had become established, winning 22 caps at right-back, while David Seaman, after being discarded by Taylor, re-established his place as the number one the moment Venables took charge in 1994. Alan Smith, so valuable to Arsenal in the late Eighties and early Nineties with his intelligence and strength in the air, was one of several to enjoy a partnership with Gary Lineker, but was constantly challenged for the twin striker's position by Steve Bull, some time team-mate Ian Wright and Peter Beardsley. Smith, to his dismay, is remembered mostly for being the substitute for Lineker in the latter's final match, against Sweden during Euro '92, when Lineker needed just one more goal to equal Bobby Charlton's all-time England scoring record. Smith deserves a better epitaph. Smith himself would be supplanted by Wright or Alan Shearer.

Stephen Morrow, a workmanlike central defender, found it difficult to command a regular place at Highbury under George Graham, apart from the 1992/1993 season, but nonetheless earned 39 caps (16 while at Arsenal) as a stalwart with Northern Ireland.

## **The New Century**

'Spot the Englishman' gradually became the catchphrase under the inspired management of Arsène Wenger, though the innovative French manager was initially dependent on a back five who all had the distinction of wearing England's white shirt: Seaman, Dixon, Adams, Keown (as alternative to Steve Bould), and Nigel Winterburn. Campbell, having had the nerve to move from White Hart Lane to Highbury, returned to favour when Sven-Göran Eriksson was summoned to the England helm in place of a panicking Kevin Keegan. By the time of the 2002 World Cup, Ashley Cole had become more or less a fixture at left-back, as a fast, overlapping additional attacker – in a team that gave its supporters so much ground for optimism but ultimately was a source of frustration – before he overlapped all the way to Stamford Bridge.

Along the way, Wenger's shrewd eye repeatedly enlisted some of the cream from foreign fields. Dennis Bergkamp, of course, was there before Wenger arrived in England, and his best international years were in the Nineties, with a further flourish during Euro 2000 in Holland/ Belgium. Lynch-pins in Wenger's

teams would be the enduring Freddie Ljungberg, of Sweden, and the imposing German goalkeeper, Jens Lehmann. Thierry Henry, that French pearl, did not make the winning World Cup side at home in 1998, though he was in the squad, alongside midfield dynamos Patrick Vieira and Emmanuel Petit, who were later joined at Arsenal by international colleagues Robert Pires and Sylvain Wiltord. Other members of a diverse squad have included Emmanuel Adebayor (Togo), Lauren (Cameroon), Cesc Fabregas (Spain) and Kolo Touré (Ivory Coast).

An enduring criticism of Wenger's reign has been an absence of defensive reliability in European competition, and it was a shrewd move, following World Cup '02, to sign Brazil's midfield anchor Gilberto, who was to contribute substantially to Arsenal's continuing hunt for trophies.

**David Miller**

# Cooper v Ali: the world watches Highbury's heavyweight clash

It was the summer of 1966 and England was completely unaware that it would soon be the proud recipient of one of the most glorious prizes in sport. But first Highbury had another prize fight on its hands, the battle for the world heavyweight boxing title between the brash, charismatic young world champion from Louisville, Muhammad Ali, who already thought of himself as 'The Greatest', and the modest, mild-mannered British Champion, 'Our 'Enery,' Henry Cooper.

It was May 21, the season had ended with Arsenal a lowly 14th in the table, but there would be a dramatic postscript as Charlie George, among other Highbury apprentices, set out the chairs on the pitch that day that would later be filled with more than 44,000 screaming fans willing their beloved 'Enery to overturn all logic – and the greatest fighter of all time. It would be, emphatically, literally, a bloody affair. The actress Liz Taylor would be refused entry to Cooper's dressing room afterwards and the fight would go down in British boxing history, but one or two things had to happen first before this convergence of wildly diverse characters in the temporary Highbury ring.

For a start, Henry had to be born. This was easier said than done since he was one of twins and his mother, Lily, had no idea that two babies – Henry and George – were on the way. "I was born in Southwark, about 400 yards from the Houses of Parliament," says Sir Henry who, in 2000, became the first boxer to receive a knighthood. "Mum never knew she was having twins. She thought she was having just one baby. We were living in some flats just between Camberwell and Streatham, not that far from the Charlton Athletic ground, and if I hadn't made it in boxing, I'd have liked to have played football. I was a pretty good goalkeeper. In fact, a couple of weeks ago I was up in the loft and I came across this old newspaper cutting that showed me in a cartoon as a 'keeper. It said: "We've just seen the new Sam Bartram." He was the most famous goalkeeper Charlton ever had. I thought that was better than all the compliments I ever got in the ring."

But first there was World War II to live through, not the easiest of tasks in south-east London during The Blitz. "We were away in the country for about six months, George and I and elder brother Bernard, but we didn't like it so mum brought us back. Everywhere was being bombed. Our house got hit, but luckily we were round at my aunt's at the time. We definitely had one or two close shaves. "We were about 200 yards from a Doodlebug that landed on a pub called the Tiger's Head one Saturday morning, killing about 30-40 people. We heard this thing switch off – that's when you had to worry – and we were running to this Anderson Shelter, just about to dive through its door, when the blast blew me off my feet. I hit my head and brother Bern had all this glass in his back where a window above him shattered. That's the nearest we came to copping it."

His father, Henry William (who everyone called "Harry") was doing more than a little for the war effort. Having served for five years in the Royal Horse Artillery during World War I, he was called up against Hitler at the age of 41 and sent to India and Burma to work behind the front line in a field hospital. He survived, watched every one of his son's fights and lived to the age of 86.

Tough stock, and it would need to be as Cooper confronted the up-and-coming livewire Cassius Clay, the reigning Olympic light-heavyweight champion, for the first time in 1963. That fight was at Wembley, the same venue for Cooper's successful defence of his British and Empire titles against Dick Richardson only three months beforehand. But this was a whole different ball game. The British audiences had never seen before so remarkably confident an individual, calling dear Henry "a bum" and predicting the Briton's knock-out in round five. It was rude, it was noisy and it was, even worse, probably quite accurate. Cooper was a brave fighter with a cruiserweight's build and a slightly pedestrian pace. He was 20lbs lighter than Clay, eight years older and though possessed of a pulverizing left-hook called 'Enry's Ammer' there was some doubt about its ability to find the chin belonging to his swift, wily, mischievous young rival.

"He was a bit of a loudmouth," said Cooper in his typically understated way. "I used to run early in the mornings up from where I lived in Bellingham over to the gasworks at Sydenham and I always saw the office cleaners going into work. All old cockney girls. They'd shout to me: 'Good luck, 'Enry. Shut that bleeding loudmouth up. Give 'im some stick from us'." That was Cooper's aim and he had a plan: to rough up the inexperienced Clay a little every time he came in close, never mind that the American was unbeaten in 18 professional fights while Cooper's record was a more pot-holed 27-8-1.

Wembley was a deafening arena that night. Clay marched into the ring wearing a cardboard crown and a gown that announced "The Greatest". The

uproar for Cooper, more modestly attired, was thunderous and rose to a crescendo in the first round as the Briton landed punch after punch, even bloodying the young buck's nose. In the second round, Clay, taking umbrage at the rearrangement of his pretty face, fought back, landing a succession of punches himself but by no means dismaying the still-aggressive elder man. In the third round, Cooper fell victim to his own frailty. He was, as they say in boxing, a bleeder. The skin around his eyes, notoriously fragile, was subjected to a furious battery of rapier punches, one of which opened a deep, serious cut over his left eye. Most boxers would have gone for the kill, given such an invitation. But Clay, who famously claimed he couldn't stand the sight of blood, had another agenda altogether. He danced around with his hands by his side, in would-be humiliation of his prey. His ringside management team from Louisville were infuriated. One of them yelled at him over the roar of the crowd to stop playing around and start fighting. He took absolutely no notice, intent perhaps on making his round five stoppage prediction come true.

It was unwise to tamper with fate, and it so nearly proved his undoing. Because in the fourth round, it happened. The punch that nearly, so nearly, laid out Cassius Marcellus Clay and would have made Cooper Britain's sporting icon of the century. Nearly, but not quite.

"The unlucky thing for me was that I caught him too late in the round. I got him with my left hook," explains Cooper. "He fell back on the ropes and then on to the deck. The count had got to two or three and then the bell went. Christ almighty. In what other country would that have happened. The home guy, fighting in his country, he's got the future world champion on the deck – and they ring the bell. I mean, I boxed in Germany and I got robbed three times. Cor love 'em. Then Angelo Dundee doctored the glove, split Clay's glove while they give him ammonia smelling salts up his nose. I've met Angelo two or three times since the fight and he told me that by the time they'd got Clay back into the corner there was no chance of reviving him so they had to do something to cause a commotion. He noticed the stitching on the glove had stretched a bit, so he tore it with his bony thumb, called the referee over and the steward in charge had to send someone back to the dressing room for a replacement, which at Wembley was about 150 yards away. By the time he got back with the glove, it was about two or three minutes later, which to any fighter is a lifetime."

That is Cooper's honest memory of the bittersweet occasion, although careful examination of the footage from the fight suggests the gap between rounds was only 65 seconds, a mere five seconds longer than custom, and Clay never did change his glove. The myth, however, is too romantic to allay and at least it spared Cooper and his supporters a fraction of the torment that he might

have otherwise suffered to be so near, yet so far.

In the fifth round, Clay ceased his clowning. His shaken senses had been restored to fight mode and perhaps now he was prepared to take Cooper's challenge more seriously. He fired a succession of rapid punches and Cooper's already damaged eye opened like a burst pipe. The referee had no choice but to halt the fight. Clay had won, as he said he would, in the fifth round. But a mutual respect had sprung up between the two men. "He called me a 'bum' before the first fight. But after I knocked him down, he said: 'Cooper's no bum. He hit me so hard it shook my relations in Africa'." Sir Henry laughed at the memory. "Which is a pretty good line. He never belittled me after that, which he did with a lot of others."

The rematch. The interest in a rematch was momentous, but first someone had to make it happen. By now, Clay had become Muhammad Ali, an American draft dodger threatened with prison for his belligerent anti-Vietnam War stance. He was also the heavyweight champion of the world, having beaten the "big, old bear" – as he called Sonny Liston – for the title. It was going to take some pressure, even more cunning and a guarantee of about \$250,000 to bring him back to Britain.

Jarvis Astaire, a London sports magnate and former boxing manager, was one of the match-makers and remembers the convoluted route to the deal. "He was persona non grata in America because Ali, as he now called himself, refused to sign up for the draft. But there was a huge clamour for a rematch between Ali and Cooper in England. So I met up with promoter Harry Levene, went to New York and started negotiations with Arthur Grafton, the lawyer representing the Louisiana Group that looked after Clay-Ali. I made the proposal which was, basically, that we would give them a \$250,000 guarantee – that's in the region of \$3 million in today's money – for the fight. He said he would think about it for some weeks. He thought about it and then we got the call. It was hugely important that we keep it secret at this stage so I couldn't even send him a telegram to confirm. Instead I called a lawyer friend of mine in Boston and he did the telegraph transactions.

"Now I wanted an arena for it and the Arsenal Stadium was perfect. These were the days when the Club wasn't flush with money, so I thought we had a chance. I spoke to Ken Friar, swore him to secrecy and we did the deal for £10,000 plus a percentage of the takings. Friar, I know, never said a word to anybody. Not one word. I always admired him for that. Now I had to make the match with Cooper. His manager was Jim Wicks, who was perfectly sound but notoriously difficult to deal with. At least he took me seriously. We arranged to meet at the Charing Cross Hotel in London. I made my proposal and we agreed a

deal of £34,000 plus a percentage of the takings. It came to £50,000 in the end.

"But now we ran into trouble. I'd done a deal for close-circuit television to show the fight live in 32 different cinemas, mainly Odeons. But the BBC and ITV had one of their unusual gettogethers and objected. Without the close-circuit television deal, we couldn't make the fight. There was a lot of kerfuffle. Eventually, there was a meeting between the Postmaster General, then Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Peter Dimmock of the BBC, a representative of ITV, myself and Ted Dexter, the former cricketer who worked for me. "Eventually, and perhaps surprisingly, this left-wing MP, Tony Benn, found for private enterprise against the television companies. As compensation I offered the rights for the delayed showing of the fight to the TV companies for £36,000. They turned it down out of pique. And I'll just tell you this as a footnote to that. We produced a film called *Fight of the Century* which was shown all the next week in cinemas round the country, including the Odeon Leicester Square. We made £96,000 from that.

"So that's how it happened at Highbury. In the end we paid Ali far more than his guarantee. With his percentage of the takings, he went away with \$540,000. Grafton wrote me a letter later saying that it was the first time in his life that any fight manager had paid him more than the guarantee."

The fight was on. It would be shown across the world, from Tokyo to Bangkok, from Dortmund to Buenos Aires, and in every major British city except London via close-circuit relay in cinemas, not to mention live in front of the eyes of the fortunate 40,000 paying from 30 old shillings to £15 for the privilege.

But first, the training. "About a month before the fight I went away," said Cooper. "Down in the Kent countryside. We always stayed at a nice old pub called The Bull in Chislehurst. Then we drove up to the Old Kent Road every day to do all our gym and spar work at the Thomas à Beckett. We had our main meal at 2pm. A nice steak. You get all these dieticians now who think you should eat pasta, but we did what all the fighters before us did. There was a reason for going away to train. It's nothing to do with the sex thing either, which is what a lot of people think! All fighters go away – any athlete must – to get in the right frame of mind.

"I only ever trained once at home and I lost badly. I thought: 'I'll never do that again.' It was because Albina, my wife, made me too comfortable at home. I mean, during training I used to run at 4am. I got up and if it was snowing and raining when I was away, I still went out with one of my trainers. But when I was training at home, Albina would say: 'Oh, it's raining. Don't go out' and I'd think: 'OK, I'll miss it today.' And that was the wrong attitude. You go away to

get mean. The first week it's a novelty, the second week you're getting a bit browned off and by the end, you're feeling pretty mean. Jim Wicks used to test me. In the first or second week, he'd say something controversial and it would go sailing over my head. I wouldn't bite at all. He'd say the same thing 10 days later, and I'd be on him straight away. 'D'you want to have an argument?' Then he used to laugh and say to the trainer: 'He's getting there.'

"The trouble with all the training was that it kept my weight down. I was skinny for a heavyweight. I'll tell you a little secret. Not too many people know this, because I haven't told too many. But when I fought Ali, Jim Wicks didn't want to give him too big a weight advantage. So he came up with a plan. In those days heavyweights could go on the scales at the weigh-in with their boxing boots on. So what Jim did was have some thick lead soles cut and put in my boots – they weighed about 2lbs each. Then he had a little square weight of very dense metal made for me to hold in my hand. And what did I weigh at the weigh-in: 13st 4lbs. So my real weight was about 12st 12lbs.

"I'd lost so much weight in training and it was a warm time of year so I went way down below my best fighting weight, which was around 13st 7lbs. I was actually under weight when I fought Ali."

Untroubled by this recollection, he laughs. "Jim Wicks was the only manager I've ever heard of who used to allow his fighter half-a-pint of draught Guinness with a double vintage port in it during lunch, as a tonic to put weight on. By the end of the meal everything would be swimming in front of my eyes, because I wasn't used to it. He had some great old ways, Jim." The weigh-in itself was at the Odeon, Leicester Square. "Ali was cracking his jokes and going through his usual routine. And as he was doing this I noticed one hair sticking out on his chest. It stood out because he wasn't a very hairy person. So I leant over and pulled it. 'Oh look,' I said. 'He is a man. He's got a hair on his chest.' For once in his life, he didn't have a response."

Cooper arrived at Highbury in style that night, in a Rolls-Royce that had to nose its way slowly through an impassioned and fevered throng around the stadium. It was the place to be. Liz Taylor and Richard Burton were there. As were the actors George Raft, Stanley Baker and Donald Houston. Bunny Austin, the former British tennis star. Boxing legend Rocky Marciano. And for the first and last time in their lives, both Henry's wife, Albina, and his mum, Lily, were ringside, at his insistence. "They hated boxing, the both of them. I think they hid under the programme the whole time." But the rest of the spectating public were beside themselves in anticipation. Cooper, appropriately, was in the home dressing room, complete with its luxurious bathing arrangements and underfloor heating. "If I'd played football that's where I'd loved to have played," he said.



"I was getting nervous, but the one thing I could always do was control my nerves. So I was in the dressing room getting ready with Jim, my twin brother George and Danny Holland, the cuts man. He was great with cuts, Danny. Had it down to a fine art. He used to swab my eye, not with water, but with Vaseline laced with adrenalin. He had it made up at Boots, the chemist. When I got cut, you can look at the old films, he swabs me down and then pinches the cut to make the blood go away. Bloody painful it was, and all. I got dressed and ready. Fighters are often superstitious. Part of my preparing included taping a little medal that Albina's aunt had given me into the top of my boot. We've all got our superstitions. I remember one fighter, a light heavyweight champion of the world, who I went to visit in his dressing room. He was totally nude except for this funny little pork pie hat. It was the last thing he took off before they called him into the ring. And it was the first thing he put on again afterwards."

Cooper, that night, was dressed a little less eccentrically. Blue velvet shorts customised with an embroidered HC on the leg and a silk dressing gown proudly displaying the union jack. The appeal to patriotism was unnecessary. The crowd outside were already bursting with national pride, including Cooper's uncle on his mother's side, a cockney of 70 who stood to attention with tears pouring down his face as the national anthem was played. "Any other time and you could have hit him over the head with a bottle and he wouldn't have blinked," said Cooper.

The fanfares were over. The referee, George Smith, had uttered his warnings and wishes for a fair fight. The protagonists doffed their extravagant clothing. Now it was just two men in shorts and in primeval battle, even the din of the audience was drowned by their ambition to emerge as the victor. "I knew that the crowd was going bananas, but mainly I was thinking that Ali was a quick learner. When I boxed him the first time, he was a complete novice at infighting, fighting close to the body. I'd had his nose bleeding in the first round because I was catching him with upper cuts in the clutches. But in the second fight, directly I got close to him, it was like being in a vice. He held on to me so bleeding tight. He was just waiting for the referee to say: 'Break!' and when he did, Ali jumped back right away so I didn't have a chance to land my left hook. You could tell he'd been schooled. Then again, just before the fourth round, I was catching him as he started to tire a bit. I thought: 'Oh, this is good. I've got his range now.'

Then the eye came open again. Same old problem. Same eye, more or less the same spot. "They were the two worst cuts I ever had in boxing because Ali was a flicker. He'd throw punches and they would flick against your skin, drag your flesh and that's what cut me. He hit me with the heel of the glove across the

eyebrow and it split. You can imagine how it felt for that to happen, when you've trained for three months, all that sweat and blood, and a cut eye lets you down. He didn't beat me because he was a better technician, a better boxer, on the day. He beat me because I had a weakness round the eyes. The ridge round my eyes was like a sharp razor. The skin had only to be touched and the bone came through. Now, I'd go to a plastic surgeon and he'd have taken the edge off the bone and it would never trouble me again. Different world."

But in that world, the one that happened that May in 1966, Cooper had to live with his frailty. As usual those in the ringside seats had to dodge the spattering blood. The referee had no choice but to stop the fight and decide in favour of the reigning champion. Cooper was disappointed but pragmatic. "The eye split. That was it. All over again." Members of the audience were devastated. Liz Taylor gallantly tried to enter his dressing room to offer her personal condolence. "Yeah, well, Jim Wicks put the block on her," said Cooper, still outraged 40 years later. "She wanted to come into the dressing room and see me, but Jim said: 'No, sorry, no women allowed.' When I found out what he'd done, I said: 'You didn't!' Cor Blimey." One suspects he embellished the sentence a little more at the time.

Cooper left Highbury the way he arrived, in the Rolls-Royce, and still the man that knocked down Muhammad Ali. Not the man who beat Muhammad Ali. As he left the Arsenal premises that night, he expected to see reflected the disappointment of his erstwhile fans. He braced himself for jeers. Instead the assembled policemen in the car park, just disbanding for the night, stood to attention and saluted as he was driven away. It was a measure of the esteem in which he was held, an affection he always retained. "I always had a good rapport with the public. I always got on well with them. Wherever I went I was welcomed. You never saw me in bars or having punch-ups in nightclubs. Jim wouldn't have allowed it. He was that type of man."

The fight was done, but Henry's association with Highbury was not at an end. When he suffered a serious injury towards the latter end of his career, his first port of call was the medical facilities at the Arsenal stadium. "I had a cartilage operation. I had a Russian dance that I could do as an exercise. I could do it as well as any Russian all around the gym. But one day when I was doing it I tore my cartilage. I went to Arsenal because footballers were treated for things like this every day. Bob Wilson was there at the time, working with the trainer George Wright, because he'd just broken his wrist. We teamed up. The thing I remember most is they used to make us run up and down from North Bank to South Bank, right up the 20-30 big steps to the back of the terraces. Bob was better than me. He was used to it. I wasn't. A boxer works on his upper body in

the main. Mind, I'd like to have got him in the gym to get my own back."

Even after his retirement, Cooper came back to Highbury. All the way to the end. He was one of the VIPs who Arsenal invited to the farewell game in May 2006, almost 40 years to the day since The Fight of the Century at the ground. Sir Henry Cooper retired in 1971 – a memorable date for Arsenal supporters – the most popular British heavyweight of all time. But while Arsenal were winning the first of their famous Doubles, Cooper was losing to a large curly-blond British heavyweight title challenger, originally from Hungary, Joe Bugner. The result of the fight, awarded to Bugner by referee Harry Gibbs, bemused on-lookers. Even the respected BBC commentator, Harry Carpenter, gasped into his microphone: "How can they take the man's title like that?" But Cooper's rock-like equanimity survived the injustice. "I've no lifelong regrets. I had a great career." He scrolled back through the years in his mind and stopped at the first Ali encounter. "If only they hadn't rung the bell. One more punch and I could've beaten him, you know."

**Sue Mott**

**16.**

# **The spirit of Highbury**

The story of the North Bank, where diehard Arsenal fans congregated for decades, a look at the memorable moments in the rich history of Highbury and the day when many of the ground's treasures were sold off at auction

# **The North Bank**

Overcrowded, smelly, terrible view, but Saturday afternoon on the North Bank was the only place to be, says Tom Watt

*We're the North Bank. We're the North Bank. We're the North Bank, Highbury.*

There's a fresh generation now, settling into their padded seats at a shiny, new Emirates Stadium, who must think we were mad.

Packed together, crushed against barriers or tumbling down the concrete steps as thousands craned to get any kind of view of the player taking the corner; spilling half that pint of watery lager down the back of the bloke in front, and a 20-minute squeeze through to the nearest toilet and back; clouds of cigarette smoke hanging just overhead, the fug cut through by the foulest language imaginable and the bitter stench of North London sweating; a hundred heads between you and clear sight of the far goalmouth; a stranger's size tens crunching up and down on your toes seconds after we'd scored. But make no mistake, when it came to football – when it came to watching Arsenal – Saturday afternoon on the North Bank was the best place to be in the world. It seems hard to believe already. Another 10 or 20 years and people simply won't wear it at all: the idea that supporters might watch football for a lifetime from the terraces not *despite* the discomfort, grief and danger but – in part at least – *because* of them.

Loud, brimming with passion or simmering with discontent, affordable and familiar, the Home end was somewhere you were free to be yourself and somewhere you were free not to be. Here was a heaving, bubbling pot in which to jostle alongside a horde of like-minded relatives, friends and strangers. Before exploding – breathless, delirious – as the ball flew past earthbound opponents into the goal below. For the generations who can still remember, the North Bank – never mind the football – was a place where you could grow up and then, for the rest of your life, never have to. Arsenal Stadium's biggest and most populous terrace was somewhere blind faith, on a regular basis, could get the better of cold reason; where the landlocked details of countless individual lives could be swallowed up, forgotten, in the roaring, rushing tide of a common sense of purpose. Players and managers came and went, the football was more or less exciting, the team more or less successful. Your own life moved on, too, for better or worse. And the world around you changed, year on year, and decade after decade. But, afternoon or evening, you knew exactly where you were on

your square foot of terrace: knew you'd always belonged there and believed you always would. The best of times, the worst of times: either way, the North Bank, for 80 years at Highbury, felt like home.

Of course, it all ended in tears. Not tears shed at Highbury – or, at least, not right away – but 160 miles north up the M1 at Hillsborough where Liverpool were supposed to be playing Nottingham Forest in an FA Cup semi-final. On the same afternoon, Saturday, April 15, 1989, Arsenal were at home to Newcastle United in the League. Nearly 40,000 turned up, expecting to watch Arsenal hang on to their narrow advantage at the top of the old First Division table. Nearly a third of the crowd, as always, crammed onto the North Bank, although a fresh, dry afternoon meant there wasn't any real pressure to find sanctuary from the elements under the roof. We all had room to breathe. Arsenal won 1-0, Brian Marwood's goal enough to snaffle another three points on the way to a first title in 18 years; a title which would be clinched at – of all places – Anfield on the season's final day. The game itself, despite its significance, was forgettable enough. Not so the couple of hours it took for the match to run its course.

There's always someone within your earshot at a football ground who's listening to events elsewhere on a babbling transistor radio. When news first began to spread around Highbury about problems up in Sheffield, the general assumption was that the situation would involve crowd disorder and would probably be of Liverpool supporters' own making: the Heysel Stadium Disaster in 1985 was, after all, still fresh in football's mind. Within minutes of Arsenal's game getting under way, though, it became obvious – as reports of what was happening at Hillsborough were relayed around the ground – that events at the semi-final were of a very different nature. And on a very different scale. We'd already got the drift, second or third hand, but a decision was made to confirm the starker details over the Club's public address system. The message echoed across the pitch, tinny and irrevocable. People – dozens of people – were dying at an English football ground. The how and why wouldn't become clear until later, of course. But, even as the first half in North London unfolded, a sense of dread settled on the place. The game became an inappropriate distraction and, by full time, the celebrations which greeted Arsenal's narrow win stuck in the throat. Applause was underscored by a thousand nervous conversations which, in their turn, were hushed by a cold, shared, unspoken understanding. Arsenal supporters – any football supporter anywhere – didn't have to imagine, didn't have to wait until that evening to see the pictures of the life being squeezed out of nearly 100 innocent Hillsborough victims. The worst of the horror lay just at the fringe of our own memories and our own experience. In the midst of it all – surrounded by family, friends and fellow fans – it suddenly felt very lonely



indeed. Don't say it. I know, that could have been you. And I know, it could have been me.

Sitting down at football matches as opposed to standing up might seem like a pretty minor detail. What's more, it took another five years for Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough Disaster to take full effect. But what happened in Sheffield that April afternoon – and then what happened everywhere else as a result – changed the game forever, certainly as far as the experience of supporters was concerned. In the all-seat stadia of the modern Premiership, we're spectators. What we're watching these days may be infinitely more sophisticated than what was set before us in the past. It's certainly more expensive and takes rather more effort by way of forward planning. We're there – at Emirates Stadium, at Stamford Bridge, at Anfield and at Old Trafford – as customers paying for the privilege. Back in the old days, although our quids at the turnstile might have been what counted on the balance sheet, it felt like us just being there was what really mattered. We were probably kidding ourselves even then, but standing, swaying and cheering on the North Bank – or The Shed, or The Kop or The Stretford End – it felt like we were doing more than just looking on. What was going on under that roof could make a difference, somehow, to what was going on out on the pitch. We still go mad when a goal goes in at their end and despair when one goes in at ours. But now we're onlookers rather than participants, aren't we? For the generations who'd grown up standing on the North Bank, the day we sat down at football was probably the day we stopped, deep down, feeling like we were really a part of it all.

*Send Arsenal up the field  
For one more goal,  
No other team can fight  
Harder than the boys in red and white.  
Never let their glory fade,  
Long may it glow,  
So let us all give out with:  
Up the Gunners!  
Up the Gunners!  
GOAL!!*

When Arsenal's new stadium first opened its gates in 1913, it had just one grandstand: a characteristic Archibald Leitch design which backed onto Avenell

Road. The largest of the three terraces, known even then as the Spion Kop, ran down the west side of the ground and was little more sophisticated than a tramped-down heap of builders' rubble. It shared an entrance with the North Terrace – which at least had its steps edged with concrete, packed behind with clinker – opposite the Tube station in Gillespie Road. Two terraced houses were bought and then demolished to enable access, first for cartload after cartload of landfill to create the embankments on three sides, and then for the thousands of 'bobites' who turned up to watch this struggling club from Woolwich who'd migrated north of the river in search of a crowd. Although the new enclosure was far from ready, 20,000 people turned up to see Arsenal play Leicester Fosse on September 6, 1913. In the rush to have the place ready, the exit gates on Gillespie Road were left open through Saturday morning and into the afternoon. Supporters could have walked straight in. In a very different age, however, they waited patiently in line for the turnstiles to open before finding a decent spot on Highbury's terraces for the first time.

Building Highbury represented a huge expense for the Club and its chairman, Henry Norris. The possibility of recouping any of that investment had to wait until after World War I, during the course of which regular league football was suspended. It wasn't until a decade after hostilities ceased that anything other than piecemeal improvement was undertaken at the Gillespie Road end of the ground. During the summer of 1928, the embankment was extended and further terracing was put in place to accommodate an extra 5,000 supporters. The rough slope up from the turnstiles to the top of the terraces in the north-west corner was, at last, replaced by concrete steps. With big games now attracting crowds of up to 60,000, the Club experimented with selling tickets at a row of pay-booths immediately opposite the Tube station which supporters gave up as they pressed through the turnstiles. It was an idea that came and went, like that of putting a roof over the terrace down at what was then the College End. Any chance of the working man being able to watch football on a winter's afternoon without getting wet would have to wait until the early 1930s and the transformation of the stadium as a whole. So, too, him getting anything to eat or drink once he'd found his way inside the ground.

The builders had called it the Gillespie Road End; the Club, as often as not, referred to it as the North Terrace. The first name that stuck with the Highbury crowd, though, was the Laundry End. Behind the terracing, and facing out onto Gillespie Road, Mayfield Laundry discharged its pipes every Saturday afternoon after closing for the weekend just before three. Depending on the time of year and, therefore, the time of kick-off – this being decades before floodlit football was even dreamt of – the entire terrace would be cloaked in a fog of steam in the

minutes before a game began or during the half-time interval. While regulars would have been used to the warm dousing, for many on the Laundry End, the experience would have been a novelty to set with the rest on a first visit to Highbury. Much of Arsenal's local support back in the 1920s was drawn from areas to the south and east of the stadium: Holloway, Hackney, Hoxton and Shoreditch. Those fans, by and large, would have walked to the ground and gone into the first entrances they came to, at the south end of Avenell Road and at the opposite corner in Highbury Hill. Many travelling from further afield, meanwhile, made use of Gillespie Road Underground station, which Herbert Chapman talked the authorities into renaming Arsenal station in 1932. By then, the Laundry End was the most populous terrace at Highbury and also the most cosmopolitan, the obvious choice for away fans and casual spectators. By then, too, Arsenal were well on the way to becoming the most successful and best-supported club the English game had ever seen.

The reward, as far as supporters at the Laundry End were concerned, for Arsenal's extraordinary domination of English football in the years before World War II was a roof over their heads. Claude Waterlow Ferrier's art deco West Stand replaced the Kop terracing in 1932. The matching East Stand opened four years later. In between, after several years of ifs and buts, a simple but distinctive shed went up over the 'Northern end'. It, too, was designed by Ferrier and carried a corrugated, white fascia around its rim, with the corners picked out in red and the front decorated by two Club crests. At the back, huge sliding doors ensured that a throughdraught continued to blow across the pitch during the week. Again with the playing surface in mind, earlier plans to cover the south terrace were set aside for fear of it casting too long a shadow across the grass. Instead, the clock that had stood at the Laundry End previously was moved and, within months, the College End was already being called the Clock End by supporters who weren't concerned about getting wet while watching football. Indeed, the weather was the last thing anybody wanting to watch Arsenal had to worry about: getting in at all was a far more pressing concern. The 1930s were a golden age for Arsenal and for the English game, and crowds of up to 70,000 squeezed into Highbury every other week to watch Cliff Bastin, Joe Hulme and Alex James lay waste to opponents' defences. If you had any sort of feel for football, 'a bob's worth of Alex' was the best entertainment money could buy.

George Allison, who succeeded Chapman as Arsenal manager after the great man's untimely death, caught the spirit of the Laundry End between the wars in his autobiography, *Allison Calling*: "Football is the greatest show on earth, the social leveller which has the man in the cap and muffler and the noble in the silk

hat urging on his favourite team. There is the man with the rattle, the man with the handbells, the man with the outsize rosettes, the man in a suit in the club's colours, the ladies with club scarves. There's the civil servant who wears a bowler all the week but sports a cap on Saturday so that Bill behind won't have to yell: 'Take that ruddy 'at orf!' The little knot that congregates in the same corner and runs a shilling sweepstake on the first goal, the winner being the one who draws the name of the player who scores it. There are continual early-comers, the hail-rain-or-snow supporters. The continual late-comers who you can see threading their way to the top of the terraces. And the thousands of schoolboys, excited youngsters who dream one day of trotting out in their team's colours."

The older of those schoolboys grew up to turn out, first, in khaki. They, along with 42 of Arsenal's 44 registered players, served in the Forces during World War II. Plans for the stadium to play its part, too, had been in place for over a year prior to hostilities actually commencing. Highbury became an Air Raid Precautions centre for the duration, while the Club decamped up the Seven Sisters Road to White Hart Lane. During the day, the pitch would be used for physical training for wardens. Islington Council used the East Stand as a first aid centre and, in the evening, the whole place was under the control of ARP workers, with up to 1,500 local residents taking advantage of the shelters under the West Stand. During the Blitz, the stadium took occasional minor damage as a matter of course, but the night of April 16, 1941, one of the most destructive of the entire war, left its significant mark on one particular part of the ground. The Laundry End was used to store beds and bedding which, when five German incendiary bombs came through the roof, provided ready tinder. With the emergency services busy fighting fires in the surrounding streets, the supplies piled high on the terraces were left to burn for several hours and the roof itself was completely destroyed.

*We will support the Arsenal,  
The greatest team of them all.  
And we will enjoy supporting  
Whether they rise or fall  
And we'll sing, sing together in aid of the AFC.  
And we'll sing, sing together in aid of the AFC.*

It was 1956 before a new covering was put in place. The Arsenal board insisted

on an exact replica and argued long, hard and – at last – successfully with the War Damages Commission for help with the cost: £24,726 and 17 shillings. By the time the new roof was in place, however, football's post-war boom was already a thing of the past. On occasion, the terraces were as crowded as they'd ever been for games that would never be forgotten by those who witnessed them: a 5-4 defeat to Manchester United in the Busby Babes' last league match before the Munich Air Disaster in February, 1958; a dramatic 4-4 draw with all-conquering neighbours Spurs in October 1963. The late 1950s and early 1960s, though, were lean times on the pitch at Highbury: less than 5,000 turned up to watch the team lose 3-0 at home to Leeds in May 1966, on an evening so unseasonably chilly – and miserable – that supporters on the Laundry End lit fires on the terrace to keep their spirits up. That game, however – Billy Wright's last in charge as manager – marked the lowest ebb. Arsenal were reborn under Wright's successor, Bertie Mee and, by the time the Club did the Double in 1971, the stadium's largest terrace had reinvented itself as the North Bank, a home end to match any in the land for noise and passion. And, of course, the occasional ruck.

Until the mid-1950s, youngsters stood on the terrace to watch football in the company of fathers, uncles, siblings and neighbours. Schoolboys might be allowed to wriggle through to the front for a better view, but, for all their wide-eyed excitement, they learnt how to behave in public – how to grow up, in many respects – on the Laundry End, under the intermittently watchful gaze of older generations of supporters. By the early 1960s, though, the Teenager had been invented and the North Bank became a place where youngsters could mix and identify with their peers, enjoying unprecedented freedom to find their own way through adolescence without adults around to tell them what they should and shouldn't do. Lads graduated from the Schoolboys' Enclosure under the East Stand and headed for the din and the danger that waited at the back of the terrace, under the roof. They'd seen the Kop and the Stretford End sway and chant and unfurl their banners on *Match of the Day* and, in no time, the North Bank had established a culture, a pecking order and a repertoire of songs all its own. And with all that spectacle came, too, a sense of the home terrace being "Us" against every other club's "Them".

It wasn't only the noise and the display which was quickly picked up on after an example had been set by our friends from the north. It wasn't as if there'd never been a fight on the terraces at Highbury in the past, but change – and, with it, an atmosphere altogether more confrontational – seemed in the air. Lower gates and increased outgoings in the wake of the abolition of the Maximum Wage brought a competitive edge to football which was reflected in the

increasingly partisan nature of home crowds everywhere. Winning had always mattered, of course. But for a new generation it was all that mattered, off the pitch as well as on it. In 1963, Liverpool supporters wreaked havoc at an FA Cup tie, throwing bottles down from the back of the North Bank onto their Arsenal counterparts below. In 1967, a pre-season friendly against Glasgow Rangers was almost abandoned – the traditional fixture, indeed, was abandoned thereafter – due to the numbers involved in fighting behind the goal before and during the game. Thereafter, the North Bank wasn't just the fashionable place for youngsters from Islington and beyond to make a racket and enjoy a bit of unsupervised fun; it became home territory, to be celebrated and defended at all costs by a self-appointed hardcore of Arsenal's most committed young fans. As well as the football, Saturday afternoon was about making sure away supporters didn't 'take' the home end.

For almost 20 years, between the mid-60s and mid-80s, if you'd paid any attention to the hysterical coverage in the press or been party to the some of the gossip that swept round the terrace before home games, you'd have been forgiven for expecting Rorke's Drift on the North Bank every weekend. In fact, real trouble – violence involving more than a dozen people and for longer than a minute or two at a time – was a rare occurrence. There were occasions when the reality lived up to its 'shock horror' billing, most notably when West Ham visited in 1982 armed with smoke bombs and, in a concerted attack, forced hundreds of supporters out of the North Bank and onto the pitch. Although, unlike most other clubs, Arsenal never put them in at the front of the Highbury terraces, fences were erected on the North Bank itself to help control the movement of opposing sets of supporters from side to side. The hint of danger – and the posturing that went with it – was, however, part of the attraction for a new generation of young fans – and for some older ones who probably should have known better. Little groups from estates and streets all over North London would find their way to the back and middle of the terrace – there was an informal, but accepted, hierarchy in operation – and become part of something that felt altogether more significant. Although other Arsenal supporters might, on very rare occasions, feel concerned for their safety, they were still drawn to the fringes of that loud and excitable core and towards a fiercely partisan atmosphere that wasn't to be found anywhere else in the ground. The majority wouldn't have dreamt of getting involved in mischief, but thrived, nonetheless, on the sense of 'We' that came with standing on 'The North Bank, Highbury'.

By the time the end came for the great standing terraces at grounds across England, life on the North Bank had changed again; changed, indeed, to a degree that it could be argued the imposition of all-seat stands on safety grounds – at

Highbury, at least – was altogether unnecessary. What crowd trouble there was inside the stadium on matchdays had long since migrated to the Clock End, where the committed few – the original ‘Gooners’ – went in search of confrontation with away supporters. The widespread use of CCTV cameras was, anyway, in the process of driving increasingly cynical and pre-meditated violence out into streets, pubs and train stations instead, often several miles away from the ground. The late 1980s’ explosion of dance culture in London, what’s more – and the swallowing of the pharmaceuticals which inspired Acid House – left football hooliganism, all of a sudden, looking very much like yesterday’s buzz. Before the terrace was torn out in 1993, however, there was still time left for the North Bank to leave its mark on Highbury’s collective memory in the modern era. And, indeed, it’s fair to say that the prospect of losing the home end brought many supporters to a conscious understanding, for the first time, of how significant a part of their own personal history – never mind the Club’s – those countless afternoons and evenings on the North Bank had become.

*Charlie, Charlie.*

*Charlie, Charlie.*

*Born is the King of Highbury*

No question but that Highbury’s finest hour had been back in April 1970, when Arsenal won the Fairs Cup – a first trophy in nearly two decades – by overwhelming Anderlecht under the floodlights in N5. The North Bank, responding to the half-time exhortations of skipper Frank McLintock, led the way on a night that had the entire stadium in excited uproar, and which ended with thousands streaming onto the pitch at the final whistle to celebrate alongside their heroes. Those same players, by and large, were the ones who would win Arsenal’s first League and Cup Double the following season. And, as far as the North Bank was concerned, one figure stood head and shoulders above the rest when it came to capturing the spirit of their collective hopes and dreams. Charlie George was Islington born and bred, a lad who’d grown up watching Arsenal from the Laundry End; now, as a player, lank hair streaming behind him, Charlie was the cheek, the edge, the bottle and the homespun passion of the terrace come to life. If he hadn’t been out there in an Arsenal shirt, we were convinced, he’d have been stood here going bonkers alongside us – little wonder he was crowned King of Highbury by the choir. The stadium had had its heroes in generations past, of course: the irresistible David Jack, the unfathomably

canny Alex James, the debonair Denis Compton and the dashing Joe Baker. In George, though, for the first time, the North Bank itself had a local hero it could call its very own.

Make no mistake, that unique connection with the terraces remains as tangible as it ever was: Charlie's still watching his boyhood team, Arsenal, home and away. And you can be sure he was at Highbury for the League Cup semifinal against Everton in February 1988 on a night which proved the North Bank had grown up, but, every now and again at least, could muster passion and decibels to match anything from times past. By the late 1980s, it was a very different place from the terrace where George had spent his boyhood. Down the years, the changing nature of the home end at any ground has mirrored changing times and changing football culture. Highbury, though, lies at the heart of an inner city community which has been transformed, time and again, since the Club moved north from Woolwich. And both the team and the crowd paying to watch them play have reflected those successive transformations. The vibrant young side which the North Bank roared on past Everton and into the Final was built around the talents of youngsters from the Home Counties – whose parents and grandparents had headed out of the capital in the decades after World War II – and the children of families who'd arrived in the capital over the same period to take their place. Tony Adams – every inch an Essex boy – lined up alongside Michael Thomas and the late David Rocastle, lads who'd learnt their football in the heart of South London.

George Allison described the Laundry End as a place where age, background and social class meant little. The common ground was football. Even he, though, might have been surprised at the melting pot the North Bank had become 50 years on. Arsenal sits at the heart of a community as cosmopolitan as any in Britain. Islington, for a century and more, has been a corner of London where rich and poor, indigenous and immigrant, radical and reactionary have rubbed shoulders on a daily basis. The unique mixture of population in the Borough has increasingly been reflected on the Highbury terraces. That League Cup semi-final was watched, from a packed North Bank, by a crowd unique in the English game: people whose fathers and grandfathers had stood on the same spot since 1913; some of them still living a short walk away from the ground, others scattered around the Home Counties and beyond, for whom supporting Arsenal is the link back to their own family's history and tradition; a diaspora of dads and lads, comfortable to be watching, now as never before, in the company of mothers and daughters, too; successive generations of immigrants – Jewish, Irish, Cypriot, Afro Caribbean, Asian – whose parents had made a first real connection with English life, perhaps, where their sons and daughters stood now;



middle-class couples and families who were now the only people able to afford to buy property around Highbury and had, in their turn, been drawn to the team – and the terrace – on their doorstep. The North Bank welcomed them all and, as Arsenal stormed Everton’s defences down below, swept 15,000 along at a roaring fever pitch, the stadium’s heartbeat on another famous Highbury night.

*Good Old Arsenal.*

*We’re proud to say that name.*

*While we sing this song*

*We’ll win the game*

Before the bulldozers moved in, over the summer of 1993, there would be other afternoons and evenings to remember, not least the celebrations – with the title already won before kick-off – during a 3-1 win over Manchester United in May, 1991. The team, and Ian Wright in particular, gave the old terrace something like the send-off it deserved, too, on May 2, 1992: another North Bank hero hitting a hat-trick in a 5-1 beating of Southampton. History, though – and Hillsborough – gave those occasions, as far as the North Bank was concerned, a bittersweet edge. Time had come to bid the home end a fond farewell, but politics and economics conspired to leave the Club’s relationship with some of its most devoted supporters looking rather fragile. The marketing of the bond scheme introduced to help fund the construction of a new all-seat North Bank Stand wasn’t as gracefully handled by the Club as, with hindsight, it might have been.

As it transpired, however, the North Bank Stand itself was a marvellous, if short-lived, addition. That said, although the new stand carried the North Bank’s name, it inspired little of the sense of community which had been enjoyed for so long on the terrace it replaced. The end of the terraces served also to shrink Highbury’s diminished capacity even further. It’s no exaggeration to say that the end of the North Bank probably spelt the end for Highbury, too, although nobody could have made the connection at the time. Competing in the modern era, against clubs with apparently bottomless transfer kitties, gate receipts still play a significant part in helping Arsenal’s year-end accounts make economic sense. In the 1930s, with the Laundry End packed to capacity, 70,000 could cram into Highbury. By the time the Club bade farewell to the old place in 2006, it held little more than half that number. Emirates Stadium allows Arsenal – as both a business and a football club – to move forward.

Even the traditionalists who complained most bitterly when the North Bank

came down, and the diehards who sense football's lost a part of its soul to the all-seat era, understood in 2006 why Arsenal's move to a new home at Emirates Stadium had to happen.

# **Highbury's historical landmarks**

## **First game played at Highbury**

**Woolwich Arsenal 2 Leicester Fosse 1, September 6, 1913**

In the beginning ... the North London Excelsior Band played 'The Conquering Hero' as the Arsenal side trooped on to the pitch for their Second Division clash with Leicester Fosse in front of 20,000 paying spectators, who generated receipts of £308. Perhaps the price of Thierry Henry's shinpad. And those were the ones that had paid. Many had not, sneaking into the half-built stadium beforehand or perched in trees overlooking the pitch that had been barely laid in time, despite 200 navvies supplied (with shovels) by the local council. The grandstand was only half-roofed, the dressing rooms were not ready, players' baths were not plumbed in and Army field kitchens (soon, perhaps, to be put to more sombre use in France) provided the hot water for the sinks.

Nevertheless, Arsenal had not come this far to be defeated or depressed. Despite Leicester opening the scoring (a feat emulated by Aston Villa 93 years later when Emirates Stadium opened for Premiership business in 2006), Arsenal fought back, with a goal by centre forward George Jobey and a winning penalty from Archibald Devine. The first case, perhaps, of Arsenal being blessed by Devine intervention. One small footnote: Jobey, the scorer of Arsenal's first ever goal at Highbury, had to be helped from the pitch with an injury before full time. With the dressing rooms unfinished, he had to be taken to a local player's lodgings for treatment, commandeering a milkman's horse and cart for the journey.

## **Herbert Chapman appointed as manager**

**June 1925**

It was unarguably Arsenal's best signing of the 20th century – until another piece of divine perspicacity brought Arsène Wenger to the Club. The arrival of Herbert Chapman transformed Highbury from a stadium of corrugated iron to London's footballing theatre of dreams. Owing to the free-flowing innovative genius of Chapman, Arsenal went from flirting with relegation into a full-blown affair with greatness.

On May 11, 1925 Arsenal placed an advertisement in the *Athletic News* for a new manager. "Only people who will not spend big money on transfers need apply," was one of the more famous stipulations. Sir Henry Norris, the autocratic chairman, had fallen out irrevocably with his manager, Leslie Knighton, over the signing of a player, Midget Morris from Workington, who he deemed too short for the task at 5' 8". Sir Henry would have his critics; indeed, he would have his prosecutions, one that eventually led to his downfall as Arsenal chairman, but his eye for the next manager was unerring. He went for Chapman, the Napoleon of English football, a man who had driven Huddersfield Town to two successive championships with another one on the way. He was a formidable football manager: energetic, enterprising, ambitious, charismatic, decisive and forward-thinking to an almost supernatural degree. Not to mention, years ahead of his time.

Many of his innovations at Highbury – the introduction of white sleeves on Arsenal's red shirts, the talismanic clock, the very name of Arsenal on the local Tube station – remained part of the dear old stadium to the end. But his legacy surpassed mere bricks, mortar and art deco decorations. Chapman fostered the spirit of Highbury, the class, the ethos – and year after year of success. Under his paternal leadership, Arsenal won two Championships and one FA Cup, but above all the Club was established as the benchmark by which all English football could be judged. It is, perhaps, a mere footnote in history that, on his debut as Arsenal manager – in August 1925 – Chapman presided over a 0-1 defeat to Tottenham Hotspur.

## **Record league win**

### **Arsenal 9 Grimsby Town 1, January 28, 1931**

The dominance of the Arsenal would become a fact of life in the 1930s and victories against ill-matched, over-run, fearful opposition were inevitable. When Grimsby Town visited in 1931, the long journey south can have been superseded in drudgery only by the long journey back north after such a comprehensive

thrashing. That history records a chap called Prior scoring for Grimsby in the first half to make the score – temporarily – 2-1, became a supreme irrelevance.

Chapman was creating an irresistible team. He had bought David Jack, handsome and prolific, in 1928; Alex James, the baggy-shirted Scots magician, the following year. That combination, along with the scuttling wing play of Joe Hulme on the right and the extraordinary maturity of Cliff ‘Boy’ Bastin on the left, shell-shocked Grimsby to an all-time record Highbury defeat. Jack scored four times, Jack Lambert, at centre-forward, claimed a hat-trick, with Bastin and Hulme each on target once. The result propelled Arsenal to the top of the table, a familiar position in the 1930s, and they remained there to claim the title at the end of the season. Goals for: a record 127.

Curiously, despite the feast of talent on display, the London crowds thought they had better things to do that winter’s day. Perhaps Grimsby were not considered a glamorous draw, but one of Highbury’s most one-sidedly thrilling encounters enticed a crowd of only 15,751. There must have been many who regretted staying at home that day.

## **First football radio broadcast**

### **Arsenal 1 Sheffield United 1, January 22, 1927**

It was entirely typical of Arsenal’s passion for innovation that the first radio broadcast of live football to the nation took place at Highbury. Sheffield United were the visitors and the *Radio Times* had printed a grid system in the magazine that allowed listeners to follow the action. From that visual aid, came the expression: "Back to square one."

Interestingly, the manager that succeeded Chapman, George Allison, was not only an advocate of BBC Radio broadcasts, he was a broadcaster himself. A former journalist who worked for the William Randolph Hearst empire in London, he was employed in many different fields – including being Arsenal programme editor and director – before becoming the secretary/manager. He made his first broadcast of a football match in 1927. When he told his wife of his plans that morning over breakfast, she replied: "Don’t be ridiculous, George, whoever heard of anyone broadcasting a football match."

There were moments of difficulty for the fledgling commentary team. For instance, the use of profanity. A ‘By Jove’ from Allison brought him a reprimand from the authorities and an elderly lady wrote to the BBC complaining of violence when she misunderstood the meanings of "beatings" and "feintings" as

they applied to a football match. With sips of port wine to ease his throat and with the unsolicited contributions from fans who would shout "It's a corner, mister," to help his performance, he continued to broadcast until he became Arsenal manager.

## **First Championship trophy**

### **Arsenal 5 Bolton 0, May 2, 1931**

From an unfashionable team playing next to a pig farm on Plumstead Marshes in front of 500 spectators, Arsenal became champions of England half a century later. The title, conceived and achieved by Herbert Chapman, was won at Highbury, with a huge crowd gathering at the end of the season to witness the presentation of the League trophy after the game against Bolton Wanderers. The festive mood was enlivened by the indomitable Arsenal forward line adding five more goals to their season's tally. The ringmaster, as usual, was Alex James, who scored the fourth goal himself, appropriately described by onlookers at the time as "a cannon".

Plans for the presentation went temporarily awry when a phantom whistle in the crowd confused the throng into believing the match was over three minutes early. A tide of celebrants invaded the pitch and it took some time for them to understand the message, conveyed by means of megaphone, that they should clear the area. Order was eventually restored, and then the joyful pitch invasion could take place for real as Mr McKenna, the Football League chairman, made the formal presentation of the trophy. A bugle sounded in the crowd, trumpeting the arrival of Arsenal's first Championship. By the time Highbury closed its doors for the last time, there would be 12 more.

Footnote: On the same day Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal's neighbours and rivals, failed to gain promotion to the First Division from the second tier. *The Islington Gazette* noted: "All good North London sportsmen sympathise with Tottenham Hotspur..."

## **Biggest FA Cup win**

### **Arsenal 11 Darwen 1, January 9, 1932**

Arsenal were not immune to horrendously embarrassing FA Cup shocks in their

history, most notably the 0-2 defeat to Walsall in 1933. But losing to Darwen, a team of Lancashire mill workers from the county's Combination League, was one step too far for fantasy.

Darwen, themselves, held hard to the belief that miracles happen. "Goliath fell! Rome fell! It may be that the great Arsenal fall!", wrote the local paper with fiery optimism. At least 500 Lancastrians travelled south hoping to witness the sports world's most phenomenal upset, but they were foiled. Arsenal's demonstrable superiority was inflicted on the travellers within minutes. The home side were 5-0 to the good with only 25 minutes on the clock. Both Bastin and Jack scored hat-tricks, with Bastin adding a fourth in the second half to claim a record for an Arsenal player in an FA Cup tie at the ground.

Darwen had their moments. Despite fielding a side that cost £25 to assemble in comparison to Arsenal's £45,000 all-stars, they scored a goal 12 minutes from time. Not merely a consolation goal, but their own small contribution to the history of Highbury.

## **Gillespie Road Tube station renamed 'Arsenal'**

**November 5, 1932**

In George Male's estimation, Herbert Chapman's greatest achievement was in renaming the Gillespie Road Underground station as one simple, resonant address: 'Arsenal'. Not only was the Arsenal manager taking on the political masters of the day, he was asking them at a time of relative austerity to expend time, money and effort on changing tickets, signs and timetables in order to accommodate his vision. The fact that he was successful chimes with Bastin's appreciation of his manager: "He could have been Prime Minister."

His methods included gentle persuasion, but there was at least one occasion when he buttonholed a government official to make an observation. "Gillespie Road – who ever heard of that," he announced with proper outrage. "It's Arsenal around here." Ironically, when Arsenal played Tottenham Hotspur shortly after Chapman's death just over a year later, so many fans flocked to Highbury that thousands were shut out of the ground. They did not go home. Instead, the strains of "*He's A Jolly Good Fellow!*" could be heard pouring out of the Arsenal Tube station where many of the supporters remained all match.

## **White sleeves appear on the Arsenal shirt**

## **Arsenal 0 Liverpool 1, March 4, 1933**

There are various accounts of how the famous Arsenal white sleeves came to Highbury. Herbert Chapman was on the golf course, one story goes, when he noticed how striking one of his fellow golfers looked in a red tank top and white shirt sleeves. It immediately came to him. Time to mothball Arsenal's mulberry colours and revert to a style much more in keeping with the Club's class and distinction. But wherever the idea came from, the white-sleeved kit was yet another example of Chapman's genius – simple, rare and eye-catching all at the same time. Annoyingly, the new kit's debut was somewhat spoiled by the home defeat to Liverpool, but at least revenge was exacted 56 years later.

The local paper, *The Islington Gazette*, admired the new look immediately, but less so Arsenal's style of play on this occasion, which they reported as over-elaborate, using "27 passes when three would suffice". (Funny, how that criticism would resurface from time to time, not least in the early 21st century when Arsène Wenger's team were at times accused of over-elaborating.)

The white-sleeved shirts would remain integral to the Arsenal identity for the rest of their days at Highbury except for one brief and abortive flirtation with all-red shirts in the 1960s – one of Frank McLintock's less clever ideas. Only in the Farewell Season, 2005/2006, did the team revert to their old claret shirts as a gesture of homage to their origins.

## **Herbert Chapman dies**

**January 6, 1934**

By new year in 1934, Arsenal had wrested the Championship lead from none other than Tottenham Hotspur. Chapman's Arsenal were steadying themselves for another assault on the title. Despite a chill he had caught at Bury on New Year's Day, the manager decided to go the next day to watch Arsenal's next opponents, Sheffield Wednesday. He returned with a high temperature and was advised to rest. But the Arsenal reserves were playing Guildford the next day and he was unwilling to surrender the opportunity to watch them. He went, returned, finally consented to rest – but too late. He died of pneumonia two weeks short of his 56th birthday.

Those at Highbury, and the wider football world, were stunned. "Herbert Chapman Dies," shrieked the newspaper billboards, to the disbelief of the



Arsenal team. George Male was not alone when he said simply: "I couldn't believe it." That the entrepreneurial football genius of his age, at the height of his powers, had died so young was a tragic loss to the sport. The entire Arsenal team turned out for his epic funeral two days later. Cars, lorries and coaches brought more than 240 wreaths, mostly in red and white, to lay at Hendon Parish Church. The Reverend Norman Boyd spoke movingly: "In standing out for true sportsmanship on the field, Mr Chapman, loyally backed by his players, set a standard which has raised the sport he loved to the highest level, and has won for him the gratitude of sportsmen the world over."

Even then, it was rumoured he could not bear to leave Arsenal. Bob Wall, the former Club secretary, a pragmatic man not prone to flights of fantasy, swore to the fact that on certain quiet nights the corridors of Highbury would echo to the sound of Chapman's ghostly footsteps, as though still surveying his empire.

## **Largest attendance at Highbury**

**73,295, Arsenal 0 Sunderland 0, March 9, 1935**

Poor Horatio. Alas, he missed the game. It remains a curious footnote to the match which attracted Highbury's greatest crowd that the conductor of the band, Horatio Nicholls, had suffered a sudden attack of influenza and the local *Islington Gazette* carried the news in case the supporters were confused by his absence.

More likely, the Highbury crowd were yearning for a goal to compensate for the spatial limitations involved when watching among 73,295 bodies. Sardine impressions were the price you paid for supporting the roaring success that was Arsenal in the 1930s. By March 1935, the team were on their way to winning their fourth title in five years. They had won and lost an FA Cup. The following year they would win the trophy again, with a 1-0 victory over Sheffield United at Wembley. They were a phenomenal team, built on Chapman's foundations and now supplemented by George Allison's entrepreneurial management. On this particular day, the numbers were swelled by the visit of Sunderland, top-of-the-table rivals, which produced a game described as "exceedingly fast", if goalless. The draw left Arsenal still top with 43 points, two points clear.

The flat-packed supporters who watched the match that day would undoubtedly find astonishing the fact that the Club moved from Highbury in 2006 because the ground's capacity was too small. The vast and splendid Emirates Stadium was constructed to cope with the extra demand, but with

60,000 seats it would still fall 13,295 short of Arsenal's greatest crowd.

## **New East Stand opens**

### **Arsenal 0 Grimsby Town 0, October 24, 1936**

The Bank of England team, pioneered by the visionary Herbert Chapman and progressed by Fleet Street maestro George Allison, deserved a suitably luxurious stadium. In the early 1930s the East Stand was functional, nothing more. The architect William Binnie was commissioned to fashion a structure to complement the new West Stand, that would astonish the sporting world by its magnitude. He succeeded. The East Stand that rose from the rubble of its predecessor offered two tiers of 4,000 seats each, offices and a boardroom decorated in mahogany, the new-age concept of covered toilets for the supporters and the huge Horse Shoe Bar, claiming to be one of the largest in the world at the time. Above all, the art deco frontage on Avenell Road was conceived and executed with such exquisite attention to detail that it formed the gateway to the stadium for Thierry Henry in 2006 just as surely as it had for Alex James seven decades earlier.

The double doors, the Marble Halls, the sweeping staircase and the bronze bust of Chapman remained throughout Highbury's lifetime. Even the under-floor heating in the home dressing room survived into the 21st century, although warm feet could not inspire Arsenal to victory on this particular day when 51,000 fans flocked to the revamped facilities. They had to be content with admiring the new £130,000 stand instead of an Arsenal goal.

## **Arsenal win Championship by 0.099 goal average**

### **Arsenal 3 Burnley 2, May 1, 1953**

Tom Whittaker, the manager, could not watch. In an agony of suspense he retreated to his office for the last 10 minutes, taking restorative nips of cognac as Burnley continued their assault on the Arsenal goal. His team had to win. A draw and the title would have been conceded to rivals Preston North End.

The electricity, uproar and urgency of the night was explained by Arsenal's fate the previous year. On course for a Double, they had narrowly failed at both. Under the hugely popular captaincy of Joe Mercer, this was the team's bid for

redemption. Preston had already played their last game. Everything hinged on Arsenal beating Burnley who, just to make it interesting, fielded Desmond Thompson in goal – the brother of the Preston goalkeeper.

The pitch was a quagmire, having received a heavy soaking during the day, but Arsenal with James Logie, Doug Lishman and Alex Forbes had the battling resources to cope with the conditions. Indeed, they entered the locker room at half-time with an encouraging 3-1 lead, but a goal in the second half to the visitors propelled Highbury to the brink of a nervous breakdown. When the final whistle blew, hats, scarves, coats, every removable garment was thrown in the air and the pitch was invaded in rampant celebration. Arsenal had finished the season level on points with Preston North End, but won the title with a better goal average. By 0.099 of a goal. It was Arsenal's second title in five years. Who knew it would be 17 barren years before the next piece of silverware arrived?

## **The Busby Babes**

### **Arsenal 4 Manchester United 5, February 1, 1958**

It was just a match to begin with. A wonderful, marauding game of switchback expectations that belied Arsenal's growing reputation as a team of mediocrity, sliding towards oblivion. Admittedly, the 63,000 fans who squeezed into Highbury were attracted by the magnetic forces of the Busby Babes, featuring Bobby Charlton, Tommy Taylor, Albert Scanlon, Dennis Viollet, Eddie Colman and the 21-year-old Duncan Edwards.

United stormed to a 3-0 lead before Arsenal stirred into life. David Herd, who would later play for United, headed the home side's opening goal and to the passionate urging of the fans, Arsenal drew level with two goals from Jimmy Bloomfield. A 3-3 scoreline would have been an honourable draw, but United, four days away from a European tie with Red Star Belgrade, were not content with shared spoils. With goals from Violet and England's striker Taylor they regained the lead. Arsenal pulled one back through Derek Tapscott and launched an all-out assault for the equaliser. The whistle came first.

Five days later, the plane carrying the Busby Babes crashed on take-off at Munich Airport. Eight of the players would die in the tragic accident, including Edwards, who lived on for two weeks before his prodigious strength succumbed to his terrible injuries.

## **Lowest-ever attendance**

**4,554, Arsenal 0 Leeds United 3, May 5, 1966**

It was a miserable season. Arsenal would finish 14th in the League and this, the penultimate game against Leeds United, had all the attraction of a night at the dentist. It was raining and Liverpool's Cup Winners' Cup final against Borussia Dortmund was being televised live, a rare and intoxicating occasion for the football fan. Thousands stayed away from Highbury, rightly sparing themselves the painful sight of Arsenal losing by three clear goals.

For the players, it was like performing in a morgue. The numbers in the stands resembled a reserve game. With little to do or watch, a few fans in the North Bank built a bonfire of loose papers and danced around it like a bored tribe of Red Indians. Clearly, across the pitch, they could hear the players shout to – or at – one another. They gathered that Bob McNab was not too happy with Ian Ure. Contributing to the unhappy picture was the rampant success of another North London XI, Spurs still basking in their post-Double glow. Then there were the domestic issues. Tea served in plastic cups that scorched your fingers, open-air terraces (not attractive in the rain) and a manager in Billy Wright, the former England captain, who had names like George Eastham and Joe Baker on his team sheet that season, but no method to make the team fire. There were few signs on this desperate night that within four years, under the tough and sprightly new tutelage of Bertie Mee, Arsenal would be back in the silverware again. If this was the lowest point in Arsenal's Highbury history, redemption was at hand.

## **Inter Cities Fairs Cup-winning night**

**Arsenal 3 Anderlect 0, April 28, 1970**

From Frank McLintock's point of view, it was time. Until this incendiary night at Highbury, the Arsenal captain had lost every cup final in which he had taken part. Two for Leicester City in the early 1960s and two with Arsenal, including the League Cup catastrophe when they lost 3-1 to Third Division Swindon Town in the mud.

This was destiny night for the Arsenal captain. Made wretched by Arsenal's 3-1 defeat to Anderlect in the away leg of the final in Belgium, he had revived by the time he came out of the showers and led his team on to the Highbury

pitch for the second leg in a state of hell-bent determination. Under floodlights and under duress to overturn the Belgian deficit, the team proved worthy of the task, driven on by a near-maniacal crowd. Bertie Mee, the Arsenal manager, had begged the fans to make their own contribution to the occasion, bringing the atmosphere to the boil.

Eddie Kelly, the young, combative Glaswegian, scored the first goal, a 20-yard drive, with no great analysis of trajectory. "I just let it go – and hoped for the best," he said afterwards. When John Radford's header hit the back of the net in the 70th minute, Arsenal almost had their hands on their first trophy in 17 years. Two minutes later Jon Sammels sealed the Club's joyous fate.

The crowd went wild at the final whistle. Charlie George's shirt was ripped to pieces and thousands invaded the pitch. Bob Wilson was chaired round the ground, oblivious to the fact that the rest of the team were already recovering in the dressing room. Impromptu dances were being held in the street. The happiest man was McLintock. "I'm able to get rid of the feeling I'm a jinx player at last," he said. And he proved it the following year when he collected the League Championship and the FA Cup in the space of six wild and wonderful days.

## **Arsenal win Championship**

### **Arsenal 3 Manchester United 1, May 6, 1991**

In fact, Arsenal were Champions before they stepped on the Highbury pitch thanks to Nottingham Forest's defeat of Liverpool in an earlier kick-off. There was no time to send for the Championship trophy and swathe it in red and white ribbons, but the news was sufficient to propel a team of redoubtable fighters, known as the "Masters of Adversity", to a celebratory victory over Manchester United with a hat-trick from Alan Smith. It was a remarkable finale to a rocky season, during which Arsenal had been fined and suffered two deducted points for a ferocious melee at Old Trafford (United were deducted one), their captain Tony Adams had been jailed for three months for a drink/driving offence, Liverpool had been beaten 1-0 at Anfield to compound their pain of 1989 and Arsenal's dream of a second Double was nightmarishly surrendered to arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-final of the FA Cup.

From all these ingredients, George Graham, the manager, somehow concocted Arsenal's 10th Championship. This title, beyond all others, demonstrated the tightness of bond and fervour of spirit that exemplified the Graham squad under duress. Ironic then, that in Arsenal's last game of the

season at Highbury against Coventry City, when the trophy was finally placed in Adams's grasp, the Champions scored six and the mesmeric winger, Anders Limpar, got three of them. Graham seemed to view the Swede much as a long-suffering husband views a highmaintenance wife: beautiful but expensive. Soon he would be gone.

## **Last game in front of North Bank terrace**

### **Arsenal 5 Southampton 1, May 2, 1992**

It had stood as a terrace since 1913, the old Laundry End, bombed and burned during World War II, but never into submission. The fervent fans who packed on to its steps came in their hordes for decades, packed like sardines in their scarves and cloth caps in the 1930s, a seething, song-singing tribe including Charlie George by the 1960s. But time was being called on the iconic structure by the Taylor Report which, following the deaths of 92 Liverpool fans at Hillsborough, demanded football provide all-seat stadiums for its spectators. It was progress, but Left Frank McLintock, who inspired his Arsenal team to battle back to win the Fairs Cup with a 3-0 win over Anderlecht at Highbury in 1970 Above Alan Smith beats Manchester United's Gary Walsh from the penalty spot in May, 1991 nevertheless lamented by North Bankers who had spent years, decades even, standing behind the goal engulfed in the fervour of their fellow supporters. Undoubtedly, it deserved a sendoff and Ian Wright, the exuberant, swaggering, theatrical striker, proved to be the perfect actor for the piece.

With five minutes remaining, Arsenal led 3-1, and yet a sense of despondency was paramount. It was good, but not that good, not quite the emotional last rites the North Bank deserved. Then Wright, typically, effervescently and singlehandedly, lifted the gloom. He seized on a pass from David Seaman, ran the length of the pitch like a rampaging bull, brushed aside a lunging tackle and rifled the ball past the Southampton goalkeeper. Thirty seconds later he scored his hat-trick. He won the Golden Boot, thwarting Gary Lineker in the process, and the North Bank, an explosion of red, white and noise, had achieved its fitting farewell.

## **Dennis Bergkamp's first goal**

### **Arsenal 4 Southampton 2, September 23, 1995**

It had only been six league games – what amounted to a month without a goal – yet already some doubt was beginning to spread. Was he up to it, this blond without a bombshell? People looked back at his history, with a raised eyebrow. The youngest of four brothers: perhaps he would not be pushy enough. He had suffered bad luck and rejection in his time in the game, missing out on Ajax's 1992 UEFA Cup Final because he was ill in bed.

After the move to Inter Milan, he had been described by one of his teammates as: "Too cool, too distant, a block of ice." Even his gardener in Italy had sold his "secrets" to *Gazetto dello Sport*, although how the Dutchman liked to plant his bulbs would hardly have been fascinating news to the Latin audience.

He had, of course, scored in Holland's defeat to Brazil in the 1994 World Cup, which demonstrated a degree of mental resilience, but that trip would have been the last flight he ever undertook on international duty. His fear of flying had become a phobia. Fear of flying, some joke.

With his debut goal at Highbury on that gloriously sunny September afternoon – a lavish coup de grace that left Dave Beasant in goal clawing at thin air – Dennis was flying at last as an Arsenal player.

## **Arsenal seal first leg of second Double**

### **Arsenal 4 Everton 0, May 3, 1998**

"The first one is the best one," said Patrick Vieira touchingly. For him, the future Arsenal captain and World Cup winner, the man who would lead the Club through their invincible 2002/2003 season, this was still the most ecstatic moment. His first Arsenal Double. Not the Club's first Double, given the more pragmatic heroics of 1971, but for players like Vieira, Petit, Marc Overmars and Bergkamp, this was a crowning glory. Foreign they may have been, but joy transcends national boundaries.

But this was the half-and-half Double. Halfexotic, half-very much Brit. While the forwards played under many foreign flags, the backline was staunchly home bred: David Seaman, Lee Dixon, Martin Keown (Steve Bould), Tony Adams, Nigel Winterburn. As ancient as oaks, as weathered as Dartmoor tors, they held their line magnificently and this was the match in which the Championship was won.

How appropriate that the game's fourth goal was scored by the ultimate English battlehardened leader that was Adams on the loose. Arsène Wenger had encouraged his team to be brave, go forward, cut free of defensive burdens when

the chance arose and Adams, charging through the middle of the pitch, latching on to a lob from Bould, thundered a half-volley into the net with the flourish of Maradona himself. His magnificent intervention took the score to 4-0, way beyond the redemptive reach of Howard Kendall's Everton and with the other goals coming from Slaven Bilic (a generous own-goal) and Overmars (two), the celebrations could begin.

France and England fused in joy. The Wenger revolution had brought skill, flair, Vieira and Petit into the Arsenal line-up, but it was the defence that had formed the solid wall against which so many teams had foundered. In the previous 13 matches, only two goals had been conceded. Eventually, the wall would crumble, bowing to the pressures of old age, but that Championship would forever stand as a rare and significant case of Anglo-Franco cooperation.

## **Cesc Fabregas becomes youngest player at 16 years 117 days**

### **Arsenal 1 Rotherham United 1, October 28, 2003**

Born and bred in the warm Catalan breezes of Barcelona, the shock of a cold London night could have frozen forever young Cesc's enthusiasm, almost before it began. His family were in the East Stand, teeth chattering, coats turned up against arctic blasts, watching their boy make his Arsenal debut, aged 16 years and 117 days. With this youthful appearance in the League Cup third-round game against Rotherham United, Fabregas broke the record of Jermaine Pennant who, four years earlier, had broken into the Arsenal first team aged 16 years and 319 days.

After 11 minutes Jérémie Aliadière warmed the audience with a goal, Fabregas looked comfortable in midfield and Arsenal held their lead until the 90th minute, despite the callow age of the team. Among other debutants that day were Justin Hoyte and Gaël Clichy, both of whom would survive as Arsenal players into the Emirates Stadium era. They learnt something that night – don't stop playing. Rotherham equalised in the very last minute of the game and, following a period of extra-time which saw no more scoring, the match went to agonising penalties. Clearly, the Fabregas family will always suspect a conspiracy to keep them from the warm. Every member of both teams, including goalkeepers, were forced to take penalties until, eventually, Sylvain Wiltord made the winning strike and Arsenal were victorious, 9-8.

It was a memorable, if shivering, occasion. Fabregas (by then a mature 16 years and 212 days) was sufficiently inspired to score his first goal in the next



round of the League Cup during a 5-1 rout of Wolverhampton Wanderers. Arsène Wenger, meanwhile, had confirmed his faith in early baptisms of action for his young players. In Fabregas, that faith would be amply rewarded. Still a teenager, the Spaniard signed an eightyear contract in 2006.

## **Arsenal field first all-foreign squad**

### **Arsenal 5 Crystal Palace 1, February 14, 2005**

Six Frenchmen, three Spaniards, two Dutchmen, one Cameroon international, one German, one Brazilian, one Swiss, one Ivory Coast international. With this multi-national squad of 16, Arsenal became the first English football club to field a team and five substitutes none of whom was British. It demonstrated a marked cultural shift for the Club which had won the 1988/1989 Championship under George Graham with no foreign players at all.

The breaking of such a xenophobic taboo understandably provoked controversy. In some quarters it was seen as the completion of an invasion, along the lines of the Normans (also French) in 1066. Chelsea had fielded the first all-foreign team in English football in 1999, but four British players were on the bench. This was the first incidence of foreign players (and a foreign manager) displacing all home talent. Arsène Wenger's explanation was simple. It was a matter of talent, not passport, he said succinctly. His options had also been limited by his two first-choice British players, Ashley Cole and Sol Campbell, being unavailable owing to illness and injury respectively. It was also suspected that in Wenger's cerebral appraisal, the more highly educated, less over-priced young foreigners would be moulded more easily into the fleetfooted, quick-thinking team he required.

There was one other retort. Arsenal won 5-1 with goals from Bergkamp (thanks to Holland), Reyes (Spain), Henry 2 (France) and Vieira (France via Senegal). End of argument.

## **Biggest Premiership wins**

### **Arsenal 7 Everton 0, May 11, 2005 and Arsenal 7 Middlesbrough 0, January 14, 2006**

Thierry Henry didn't even start. Nor did he score. Incredible as it seems, the first

time the Arsenal forwards cut loose with a devastating ‘Magnificent Seven’ Premiership goals in a game, the great Frenchman was nursing a groin strain. Arsène Wenger was saving him for the upcoming FA Cup Final [which, in the end, Henry was not fit enough to play in]. Luckily, a couple of friends filled the void.

Against an Everton team that had qualified for the Champions League and were metaphorically already basking on their sunloungers, Dennis Bergkamp ran a beautiful riot. He made the first three goals for Robin van Persie, Robert Pires and Patrick Vieira respectively. Half-time intervened, but not the Everton defence when the match resumed. Pires, Edu, Bergkamp himself and Mathieu Flamini contributed to the fantasy scoreline. Highbury wondered if they would ever be treated to such abundance again.

Less than a year later, they were. It was fitting that in the splendid stadium’s farewell season, the outgoing Arsenal team played a game superworthy of their wonderful surroundings. There were 114 days of Highbury history remaining when Henry became the embodiment of an unstoppable force. He galvanised the teammates around him and scored a hat-trick himself as Middlesbrough, under the guidance of soonto- be-England manager, Steve McClaren, simply laid down in admiration at his dancing feet.

Funnily enough, Wenger had been concerned that Henry’s uncertain future (rumours were as heavy as lead that he would be leaving for Barcelona) might contribute to a dwindling of form. Three goals, plus contributions from Philippe Senderos, Robert Pires, Gilberto and Alexander Hleb, said not.

## **Thierry Henry scores his 100th Premiership goal at Highbury**

### **Arsenal 3 Blackburn Rovers 0, November 26, 2005**

Records fell like confetti around Thierry Henry in his last season at Highbury. Most significantly, Ian Wright’s Arsenal all-time goal-scoring record (185), which the Frenchman shattered away from home against Sparta Prague in the Champions League. Recovering from a groin injury, no one had expected to see him on the pitch except as a second-half substitute. Ever the dramatist. "I am just over the moon about the record," he said afterwards, an Englishman in cliché if not birth.

Highbury rang with cheers and appreciation when he made his next appearance, but there were also a few home records to appreciate. Not the West Ham game in the Farewell Year, admittedly. During the game Henry broke Cliff

Bastin's record for League goals with his 151st for Arsenal, but the achievement was lost in a 2-3 defeat and the disappearance home of Sol Campbell at half-time. At least the home game against Blackburn Rovers in the final season gave the crowd full rein to celebrate Henry's heroics, aesthetic, athletic and prolific amid a 3-0 trouncing. His goal was his 100th Premiership strike at Highbury and he expressed his feelings for the wonderful stadium with typical élan. "I would love this place to be my garden," he said. Ironically, the wish would be possible when Highbury reopened as a set of luxury apartments later on in the 21st century. The pitch was indeed due to be remade as a garden.

## **The Final Game**

### **Arsenal 4 Wigan Athletic 2, May 7, 2006**

It was not just a match, it was a closure. After 93 years of drama, trauma, victories, defeats, hatchings, sackings, prima donnas, heroes, failures, monumental performances, primordial tackles, songs, love, bile and wonder, Arsenal fans were saying goodbye to Highbury, which was more than a stadium. It was home.

Grown men wept unashamedly as the invisible curtain came down on history. The stage had been filled one last memorable time with a bravura performance from the Arsenal team, and a hat-trick from Thierry Henry. But Wigan had supplied gallant opposition, sufficiently unbowed to take a theatrical lead that required overhauling in dramatic style and the fans entering into the spirit of the occasion by wearing the blue T-shirts that the Club had left on their seats. Wigan Athletic substitute Andreas Johansson even broke a record. He came on and was sent off (for a foul in the penalty area) before he had kicked the ball.

But that was a footnote. The storyline was Arsenal. Everyone, bar Wigan, was decked out in red and white. The whole stadium was candystriped in colour. All the better to celebrate the news that Arsenal's victory earned them the last available Champions League berth, depriving arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the process. Dennis Bergkamp came on as a second-half substitute to a huge roar of appreciation, swelled by the news from Upton Park that Spurs had just shipped the goal that would lose them the game. Could it get any better?

Only with a post-match parade of former Arsenal favourites, including the beloved Charlie George, Ian Wright, Willie Young, Alf Fields (an Arsenal player in 1936) among many, many others. George Graham looked immaculate (as

ever) and was welcomed unreservedly. Thierry Henry was presented with the Golden Boot by his manager. David Rocastle, one of Arsenal's young Championship winners, who had died of cancer at 33, was remembered with huge warmth and applause.

Slowly, the fans dwindled away. But late, late into the evening, a few remained, remembering the long-gone dads, uncles, friends, who had first inspired their love of Highbury. They sat on, paying their last respects. It was significant that among them, gazing out over the pitch, was Dennis Bergkamp.

**Sue Mott**

# **A face in the crowd**

**Arsenal supporters come from all walks of life, including many famous names from the world of sport; but all share an unshakeable devotion**

## **Graham Stubbles**

### **Aka Frank Stubbs, Arsenal.com diarist/blogger**

In 1999 the Club's official website asked everybody who was interested in becoming the official 'Fans' Diarist' to write a sample 'Blog'. Subsequently, I was invited to take up the position and provide daily updates; I've received comments from all over the world, including one from the Turkish Prime Minister.

Why Arsenal? Because my father told me as a kid that he would take me to watch netball if I wanted to support anyone else. Since March 1989 I haven't missed a home game in any competition and I've missed only six away matches, including our 14 seasons in Europe in that time. And for the past eight years I have been to every pre-season fixture, too.

I do everything possible not to miss a game. For example, in the mid-1990s we played Norwich City in the League Cup at a time when I had booked a holiday with my girlfriend in Scotland. We drew the game at Highbury, however, and guess when the replay was scheduled for? My girlfriend was forced to spend all day in a car travelling from our cottage, north of Inverness, to the midweek replay at Carrow Road. We stayed that night in a B & B in Norwich before travelling back to Scotland the following day, a round-trip of more than 1,000 miles. Watching the match highlights in our B & B later that same night was probably the last straw. She left me soon after that...

If I were stuck on a desert island with one player, who would it be? I'd have to take two: Tony Adams, the real 'Mr Arsenal', and Dennis Bergkamp, the only player I have ever felt in awe of when briefly meeting him in Austria at a pre-season camp. I would want to know the emotions they went through as players at certain key times so I could compare them to my own as a fan.

## **Paul Fineman**

## **Lifelong fan and collector**

Ian Wright stands in the entrance hall at home – an essential part of the ambience. Obviously, I loved ‘Wrighty’ both as a player and a personality. I think it’s great to hear him still refer to Arsenal as ‘we’ ... he’s unapologetically biased – beautiful.

Following Arsenal was my destiny. Actually, my brother, Howard, was an Arsenal supporter and was a big influence, although it’s hard to know when I became a fully-fledged fan as it seems to me this happened at birth. Several years ago my wife, Lesley, and I went for a meal at a local Italian restaurant and our waiter greeted us with: ‘Ah, beautiful Signora, how lovely to see you again. And Signor Arsenal, how are you?’ I considered myself to have been given the more flattering compliment.

My sons, Josh and Marc, and I have developed a ritual that has become more extreme over the years. One of us will say: ‘If you don’t (followed by an act that is only limited by it not being too dangerous), ‘we’ (ie Arsenal) ‘won’t win’ (followed by ‘the league’, ‘a cup’ etc). This practice has spread throughout our family and friends and happens randomly, in any circumstance, and has involved some interesting ‘blends’ of food being consumed and rubbed in, or onto, various parts of the body. This has served us particularly well and is, undoubtedly, an influential factor in our recent successes.

I started collecting memorabilia when I was 10. Each item I have, such as a 1932 FA Cup Final shirt, represents a special train of thought leading back to an incredible era of the Club’s history. I take satisfaction in obtaining an item through detective work – often involving correspondence all over the world. I have a stadium poster I really love from a 1954 match in Moscow against the famous Dynamo team: it’s incredibly evocative of Soviet Russia.

## **Marvin Berglas**

### **Professional magician and collector**

My earliest memory is of my first match – the 1969 League Cup Final against Swindon Town. I was nine and, despite the poor result, I was hooked for life. My dad came up trumps with match tickets for that first game, but I later found out that my grandad was a regular at Highbury throughout the 1930s. He left me his one share in Arsenal, which I cherish. My twin boys, Matt and Jack, will

definitely keep the Gooner tradition going.

As a 13 year old, a school friend and I travelled up and down the country on the 'soccer special' trains following Arsenal: if only my folks knew the adventures we got up to. I particularly remember winning 2-0 away at Liverpool in the 1972/1973 season, thanks to goals by Alan Ball and John Radford, to go top of the league that day.

As well as being a massive fan, a season-ticket holder and the regular right back in the Arsenal Ex-Pro and Celebrity XI, I am the Gunners' resident magician – Marvin's Magic is the biggest magic brand in the world and known to children everywhere. Since 1993, I have spent matchdays performing magic for the VIPs and sponsors at Arsenal.

I am a lucky lad because the Ex-Pro and Celebrity XI has enabled me to play alongside greats such as Radford, Peter Marinello, Alan Smith and Liam Brady. Radford was one of my first Highbury heroes, along with Frank McLintock, Geordie Armstrong, Peter Storey, Bob Wilson and Charlie George. How could they not be? Inspirational skipper, great wing play, tough tackles, hedgehog saves – who could forget the way that Wilson bravely smothered the ball at the feet of onrushing forwards – and outrageous haircuts, respectively.

I was a bit too young to experience the 1970/1971 Double, but more than made up for it in 1997/1998. It is one of my most magical Arsenal memories. I was booked to entertain at Wembley before the match, watched us complete the "double Double", and that evening was invited by Tony Adams to join the players' party where I was entertaining them. It was like something out of *Jim'll Fix It*, the television show where dreams come true.

## Shovell

### **Aka 'The Drum Warrior', percussionist with the band M People**

My love of Arsenal might explain why I'm 42 and still single. Apart from my mum, my dad and my brother, my longest relationship has been with the Club. I've been in raptures of joy with Arsenal, I've cried with Arsenal, I've travelled thousands of miles to see Arsenal: it really is a very special relationship.

By rights I should be a Millwall fan – I spent my early years in New Cross in south London – but then 1971 happened. I don't remember the Double as such, because I was too young, but my dad and I watched the Cup Final and I do remember all the talk and the red and white everywhere. I was immediately captivated. I remember Charlie George just lying there after scoring the winner;



Charlie is now a friend of mine, which I find amazing. The whole scene became embedded in my personal football memory.

I saw Arsenal play at Crystal Palace in the mid-1970s, but my first time at Highbury was at the 1980 Cup Winners' Cup semi-final against Juventus. I could hardly see a thing, but I still loved it. The next year I got a season ticket on the North Bank. There was nothing like it; it was such a passionate atmosphere, and as soon as anything happened a surge ran through the terrace. Like the Club, Highbury had class stamped all over it.

When George Graham came along, we were off again. George raised the bar, but Arsène Wenger has raised it even higher. He keeps the traditions of the Club alive and, like Herbert Chapman, he's led us into the future while still maintaining the things that make Arsenal great. He's an absolute genius.

Once upon a time if we lost, it would take me two days to get over it, but now I've seen League titles, FA Cups, Doubles, European finals, everything. So I can take a step back and think I've just been incredibly lucky to be a supporter over such a fantastic period for Arsenal Football Club. Privileged.

## **Frank Warren**

### **Boxing promoter**

I was brought up in Islington and went to the Highbury County Grammar School, a couple of hundred yards from Highbury, so the Club has always been a major feature of my life. My dad and uncles used to go to the West Stand but, like all kids, I wanted to go with my mates. We'd buy a ticket for nine old pence and, being skinny lads, would squeeze through the railings and go and stand on the North Bank ... two hours before kick-off. It was completely sad stuff!

I'm still a bit of an anorak at heart. I have a good collection of signed team sheets and programmes. The most quirky thing has to be a limited edition Louis Vuitton leather football signed by one of the Double-winning teams. Someone gave it to me to take the p\*\*\*, of course, but there can't be many of them kicking around.

How does my love of football compare with boxing? It's even. As soon as I get the new fixture list, I try to organise the dates of my shows so they don't clash. That takes some doing, but that sums up my passion for Arsenal.

I used to have an eight-seat box in Highbury, but had to take a 15-seat in the new stadium, or I'd have been stuck in the corner. My all-time dream guest list would include my favourite player, the late Joe Baker; Muhammad Ali; Arsène

Wenger, George Graham and Herbert Chapman, the three greatest managers; Pelé; Ken Friar, who went from office boy to managing director; Frank McLintock; Ted Drake, the old centre-forward; and then all my kids, who are also massive Arsenal fans.

Without doubt, the best line-up was the Double-winning side of a few seasons back. We witnessed the best football played by any team in this country. For someone who grew up on the 1-0 'boring, boring' stuff, seeing that fluidity and athleticism was phenomenal. I hope we see it again, but I don't think we will.

## **Frankie Dettori**

### **Superstar Italian jockey, and Derby winner**

My introduction to Arsenal came through Willie Ryan, a fellow jockey and mad keen Arsenal fan, who got me tickets for a game. He was also friendly with David O'Leary and knew about half of the players.

My first recollection of Highbury was being in the Clock End, when spectators were still standing up, back in 1988. There was a really great atmosphere; that's when I started being a dedicated Arsenal supporter.

A few years after that the Italian footballers arrived to play in England – one of them was Gianfranco Zola at Chelsea. But by then it was too late for me to change my football club. I started with Arsenal, so I stayed with them.

Although that 1988 game was my first 'moment', the greatest was the last time that I went to Highbury. It was for the game against Juventus in the 2006 Champions League and I was sitting with one of my all-time heroes, Liam Brady, and his wife. I had also backed a 2-0 win [which it was] at odds of 10-1, so it turned out to be a fantastic evening all round. I've never seen Arsenal play so well. For me, that was the last and the best game ever at Highbury.

I'm sad that the Club had to move home. I knew all the stewards at Highbury, the guy on the shirt-selling stall outside the ground, even the burger-van guys. I used to see the same old fellas there, year in, year out.

Highbury was a beautiful place. I took my son, Leo, to his first ever football game there, and I even played there in an Arsenal celebrity team many moons ago. I played on the right wing because I can run a bit. It was great because I'm banned from playing in the jockeys' team because I never pass the ball. It's all me – me me me... Because of that I was only allowed to stay on the pitch at Highbury for 45 minutes.

## **Marco Pierre White**

### **British chef and restaurateur**

I can recall the precise moment I became an Arsenal supporter – it was on December 11, 1971, when my father bought a Subbuteo game for me and my brother. I was a Leeds United fan at the time, because we lived on the same estate in Leeds as Eddie Gray’s mother-in-law, but my brother bagged the Leeds team. I asked my dad, ‘Who’s the second-best team?’ and he said, ‘Arsenal’. So I supported them, and have done ever since.

My whole view on football is that it’s a religion, as well as a romance. I worshipped Highbury more completely than I ever did any Catholic church. Put it this way, if it was a choice between lighting a candle or going to a match, I’d be at Highbury.

The moment at Highbury I most remember is getting tickets for me and my then 10-yearold son, Luciano, from a friend of mine, right on the halfway line, upper tier, East Stand. It was a Sunday game and we were late arriving – two minutes to four. Outside the ground was deserted and then we came out of the empty corridors into the light and noise of the stadium. My son’s face when he experienced it for the first time brought tears to my eyes. It was like stepping into an illusion. The occasion was so enormous that Arsenal has now become part of his DNA, just like it is for me.

It was difficult to say farewell to Highbury. A little part of me understands that everything has to change, but the bigger part of me loves the old world. Maybe I’m just a romantic, but I love the old Arsenal, the old Highbury – Frank McLintock ran out onto that pitch, and Charlie George and David Rocastle.

## **Mark Ramprakash**

### **Surrey and former England cricketer**

When I was six, a neighbour from across the road took me to Highbury to watch Arsenal play Aston Villa. After that I always loved football in the winter and cricket in the summer.

I used to play football to a reasonable standard, too. At 13 or 14 I was playing for Watford schoolboys, but by 15, cricket had very much become my first love. That’s not to say that I could have ever become a professional

footballer – the competition is just ridiculous.

As a fan I flitted between Arsenal and Liverpool – Liverpool were winning everything, and it was that boyish thing of wanting to be supporting the winners. Arsenal had an edge, though, because I used to be a defender and George Graham, the manager at the time, put a lot of emphasis on defence. Tony Adams was a hero, and I loved Ian Wright. The 1989 victory at Anfield to clinch the league was the turning point in my commitment.

The 1990s were dominated by my cricket, but in 2000, after I'd spent 10 years at Middlesex County Cricket Club, I had a benefit year and part of that involved spending a day at Highbury. We played indoor cricket in the school and then watched Arsenal v Deportivo La Coruña in a UEFA Cup tie. It was there that I was approached to play for the Arsenal charity side. I am now a regular, running up and down the right-hand side. I can't say that I have any tricks I'm proud of: honest commitment is what I'm about. I try to give 100 per cent.

At home I have a signed Thierry Henry football boot in a framed box on my wall, and a smart print of the Legends of Highbury.

The new stadium is a fantastic arena to watch football in. I bought an executive club-level seat for the first season. Inevitably it's taken time for supporters to bed into Emirates Stadium after so many years at Highbury, but the familiarity will soon be there and I'm sure home results will get better.

## **Ian Poulter**

### **Professional golfer**

I have attracted attention on the golf course for expressing my allegiance to Arsenal in ways that I find fun: wearing a maroon Arsenal home shirt during the Abu Dhabi Championship in 2006, painting my hair red and white after we won the FA Cup, getting my former sponsor to embroider the Arsenal crest on all of my golf shoes. There are a lot of pictures around of my feet... Looking back, the red-and-white hair was quite ghastly, but people can relate to that and enjoy it.

I do like to be colourful on the golf course; I've always liked flamboyance. Payne Stewart and Ian Wright were two sports personalities I could relate to. Of recent Arsenal sides, Thierry Henry was another – a slick, cool dresser.

My dad was a keen Arsenal fan and put a shirt on me when I was five. I played football until I was 15; I had aspirations to be a centre-half because I was big as a kid and could be quite intimidating. Unfortunately, I have to admit I had a trial for Tottenham Hotspur, but I was rejected, which is a relief looking back,

because I was always a Gooner.

I never got to see any games as a kid other than on the telly since, between the age of 15 and 23, I worked in a Pro Shop every weekend, so going to Saturday matches was never an option. It was only a couple of years ago that I could afford to go – now I've got two season tickets.

Over the past 10 years, through playing golf, I've got to meet a lot of players: Ian Wright, Lee Dixon, David Seaman, Ray Parlour, Dennis Bergkamp. They've gone from being idols to being friends, which is an honour for me.

My best moment has to be the FA Cup Final in 2002: watching Ray Parlour steer a 30-yarder into the top right-hand corner to beat Chelsea was awesome, especially as I'd spoken to Ray before the match and he'd promised to give me his shirt.

## **Maria Petrie**

### **Fan for 57 years**

I'm famous for being vocal. I was on the ITV programme, *The Highbury Years*, when a camera crew followed me to a match and got me to do my loudest chant, so now people say, 'It's nice to meet you after all we've heard'.

The words to the traditional Arsenal songs can sometimes get a bit risqué, but I change those. For example, "Who's that team we call the Arsenal/Who's that team we all adore/They're the boys in red and white/And they fight with all their might/And they're out to show the world the way to score."

There is rhyme and reason to how loud I go, though. If the stadium's very quiet I let rip with lots of different songs. If everybody's cheering and singing, I don't need to do my chanting: I just join in. Players have said they can single out my voice from the pitch.

I've been following Arsenal for over 57 years, from the days before we had television. I had a Saturday cleaning job and I would listen to the radio and Arsenal just happened to come up a few times on various programmes. I remember someone in Africa asking a little boy which football team he supported and he said Arsenal. 'Arsenal? So do I,' the reporter said. I was very rebellious then, and thought, 'I'm not going to support that team like everyone else'. But I have done ever since.

Since I retired, and as I'm on my own, I spend all my money on football. I travel away with the Club: my most treasured memory is of an away Cup Winners' Cup tie against Sampdoria in 1995, when we lost the 90 minutes, but

went through on penalties thanks to David Seaman, who the team paraded on their shoulders. My voice was really hoarse after that one.

# **Crown jewels go under hammer**

**Nick Callow, journalist and lifelong Arsenal fan, sees Highbury's treasures sold at auction in the final act of the ground's closure**

We knew the times they were a-changing when it was announced the clock had been removed from the Clock End around 2pm the day before. This really was the end of Highbury as we knew it. And here we were, at the Home of Football, soaking up the sights and atmosphere one last time, trying to buy some tangible memories to take home forever.

People were queuing outside the ground before nine o'clock in the morning – even the hotdog and hamburger crews were there – and left well after nine at night. There was not even a match to watch – this was the Highbury Auction. But it was, after all, the last-ever public event at Highbury.

Fittingly, it was a long, beautiful summer's day. There had not been a spare seat and barely a dry eye in the house when Thierry Henry's hat-trick secured a place in the Champions League in a 4-2 win over Wigan Athletic in the last match to be played at the old ground.

And memories of that amazing day were still fresh when we filed back into our favourite place in the world 83 days later to see the family silver lovingly sold off before we moved home, down the road to the already impressive Emirates Stadium. On this occasion there were about 3,000 of us spread across the West Stand and there was an impressive team of auctioneers on the hallowed turf below. Meanwhile, more than 2,000 Arsenal supporters around the world logged on to the internet, ready to bid for anything from a bin and a toilet sign to George Graham's old desk.

Keith Edelman, Arsenal's managing director, kicked us off with a welcoming speech and it was good to see the godfather of Highbury, one of Arsenal's most loyal servants, Ken Friar, in the directors' box too.

Flowers still adorned the statue of Herbert Chapman, in memory of the late Paddy Galligan, who had helped to keep the Marble Halls and dressing rooms shipshape since 1976. Emotions really were being pulled all over N5. Around 1,500 items from Highbury, including pieces of the pitch, had already been sold in a series of successful online sales, but the "crown jewels" had been kept back by Arsenal and appointed auctioneers Bache Treharne for the Highbury Auction event.

The first lot was a sign signalling the first Highbury match back on September 6, 1913 when Leicester Fosse were the visitors. That went for £5,000



and it was to a mixed reaction that the auctioneer announced "the first lots are always the cheapest". The next lot was a photo of Le Boss, Arsène Wenger, from the 1998 Double year. That sold for £4,000 to a bidder inside the stadium; the next went online to "Mark in Singapore" while a man called Ian Wright bid for a photo of Ian Wright. Those of us holding our daily cashpoint limit sat back to wait for what just might be some cheaper items – such as toilet tiles and changing room boot hooks. No chance; the bulldozers were due in two days' time and this was the last chance to grab a piece of history.

The lot which attracted the highest bid on the day was Graham's old desk and chair, which were sold for £25,000. The wide-ranging historic and quirky items up for sale at the Highbury Auction included life-size cut-outs of Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp (a woman on the web called "Judith" bought them both), a beautiful tray with the classic art deco AFC symbol fetched £4,750, a wax dummy of George Graham (£800), an Arsenal banner that was spread out over a quarter of the pitch (£325 to "Jason" on the web), the goalposts and nets (£1,750 and £2,000), the centre circle (£500), Arsène Wenger's seat in the dugout (£1,600 to "Richard" on the internet, cheered on by his son in the background), leather chairs and a table from the managing director's office, selected carpets from VIP areas, a red double-decker bus used in the Highbury museum and all the numbered pegs from the Highbury boot room. The iconic Arsenal tiles also fetched four-figure sums.

Edelman said: "It's great that so many Arsenal supporters and memorabilia collectors from all around the world visited the stadium and logged on to be a part of the Highbury Auction.

"The interest from the bidders in the items on offer was amazing and we're delighted that so many people are now able to own a piece of Highbury and that a great amount will be going to charity, including the David Rocastle Trust."

The man who brought the hammer down on the lots at the Highbury Auction, Bache Treharne auctioneer Kieron Gammell, was also delighted with his day on the Highbury pitch, where his team had set up for the day on a grand stage with massive speakers and screens to convey events around the stand.

He said: "I have worked at many high-profile auctions over the years, but I have to say that the Highbury Auction really was the most unique and exciting event that I have been involved in. It was a privilege to be part of such a significant event which created a huge amount of worldwide interest. For me personally, as an Arsenal fan, it was also a dream come true to perform in front of thousands of people at Highbury."

And perform he did, with the atmosphere rising again as the sun began to set on Highbury for the last time – officially. The last programme off the production

line – the final one for the final match against Wigan – and a match sign from the same day were both bought by the same anonymous woman for £7,500 and £11,000 respectively.

Her generous bids were cheered around the now emptying stadium while some of us had to settle for the magical memories rather than physical items. The Highbury Auction may not have reached the same levels of excitement as some of those remarkable matches, but it was another occasion that many of us will proudly reflect on as a fitting final farewell to Highbury, the Home of Football.

**17.**

## **Pastures new**

The closure of Highbury was a wrench, but the move to Emirates Stadium had to be made if the Club was to enjoy prosperity in the 21st century

# **Shape of the future**

**Highbury was home for 93 years, but a move was inevitable. Rob Clark talks to Rod Sheard, of architects HOK Sport, the firm which masterminded the switch to Emirates Stadium**

Everyone associated with Arsenal Football Club – staff, players and fans alike – will have a favourite Highbury memory. How could they not after the Club's 93 years in residence had seen them win 13 League titles, 10 FA Cups (including a record three Doubles), two League Cups, the 1970 Fairs Cup and the 1994 European Cup Winners' Cup?

However, the time had come to move. Highbury couldn't adequately accommodate one of the nation's biggest clubs and expansion on the existing site was no longer possible, and so began the painful process of finding a new home.

Quickly onboard was HOK Sport, one of the market leaders in sports architecture. Under senior principal Rod Sheard, HOK can boast a veritable roll-call of the world's foremost sporting venues, including the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, the Telstra Olympic Stadium in Sydney, the redeveloped Lansdowne Road in Dublin and Wimbledon's new Centre Court tennis complex. Just as importantly, HOK and Arsenal had worked together before, when the famous North Bank stand was updated in the mid-1990s. This time around, though, more radical surgery was required.

"The Club wanted to stay in North London if at all possible," says Sheard, "but a number of options were considered. One serious contender was King's Cross, behind where the Channel Tunnel link comes in. It was actually a pretty good site, but we wouldn't have been able to get our hands on it until Crossrail [a plan to build railway connections across the south of England by 2015, including new Underground routes in the centre of London] is finished, and it still isn't finished now, so I'm glad we didn't wait.

"We even considered putting the new stadium on top of Finsbury Park Tube station, but then one day Ray Spencer, a local estate agent and lifelong Arsenal fan, rang me and told me he owned a piece of land within a few hundred metres of the existing ground. So we went out to have a look at it and it was just big enough for what the Club wanted. Just."

By the standards of London's much-delayed new Wembley Stadium, building work at the Ashburton Grove site by Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd was fairly swift, and relatively painless. "Generally, we find with these big stadiums, which people have been planning – dreaming about even – for some time, that when the pieces fall into place, they tend to do so quite quickly," says Sheard.

"It's simply that everybody's so adjusted to the concept of what is the minimum acceptable solution that, whether it's a piece of land or a piece of funding, suddenly when everything gels it moves quite fast, within months. But then, of course, the whole logistical process kicks in, of dealing with the planning and so forth. Fortunately, Islington Council was very keen for it not to be just a football stadium – that it should be an Arsenal destination more than just a venue for matches, and that was very much in line with what we had in mind."

Anybody who's been to Emirates Stadium, whether or not on a matchday, will acknowledge that the Club and HOK have clearly succeeded in creating not just a stadium, but a venue which retains the kind of character and atmosphere that help to make English football grounds unique around the world.

"One of the real strengths of Emirates Stadium is the way it just nestles comfortably into those kind of tight, grubby North London streets," says Sheard. "You can literally be within two blocks of it and not know it's there - depending on which direction you're coming from. Then suddenly you turn a corner and catch a glimpse of it, yet it's not some massive, huge thing in the air. Yes, it's still big, but it relates to that part of London. I really think that aspect's been very successful.

"Of course, we were going into a pretty dense urban area, where we could really take advantage – firstly, of all the transport links and infrastructure, and secondly, of the fact that a large part of the area was being used by Arsenal already. That meant we didn't have to convince people that crowding 60,000 people into the area wasn't going to cause too much disruption." As Sheard points out, Highbury had previously housed 60,000 people or more in the days when supporters were able to stand on the terraces.

Most of Arsenal's early years were spent at the Manor Ground, in Plumstead, apart from a three-year period, from 1890 to 1893, when they were at the nearby Invicta Ground. The Manor Ground was initially just a field, but the Club had installed stands and terracing by the time of their first League match in September 1893. It all seems a long way from the glories of Emirates Stadium, which Sheard believes has probably another five years or more of development still to come, depending on what additional land might or might not become available. But now, more than ever, the Club is designed to play a central role in the surrounding area.

"Football stadiums used to have the reputation of being 'bad neighbour' buildings, and that was probably fair," he says, "Every two weeks the lights went on, the gates opened and people used it. But the rest of the time these stadiums were just like black holes, concrete jungles – why would you go there? Why would you want one on your doorstep? It's changed dramatically for the better

now, though, because that idea just didn't make any sense at all: you spend an awful lot of money building these things, so you've got to make sure the stadiums are used as much as possible – not just for football, but virtually every night of the week for something. It's about opening the Club up and being more inclusive.

"In recent years, I think football clubs have moved away from catering purely for that 18-26-year-old group of men; now they're attracting a greater number of older people and children. Generally, people now feel more comfortable about taking their kids to a match, whereas perhaps 15 years ago they might have thought twice about it because of some of the issues that were happening around some clubs, such as hooliganism. So the crowd that the Club hope to attract now is not necessarily the same type of crowd that they attracted in previous years: residential accommodation, retail outlets, cafes and the like have all become massive considerations.

"City planners, councillors and local authorities have also started to realise that these stadiums are a really useful tool in helping to plan a city. Stadiums can act as catalysts. There are a few good examples in the United States and Australia, where a stadium has been built in a strategically important position in a city and, sure enough, it's kick-started development, and those parts of the city have been transformed. Rather than just adding to the existing structure, you're creating a new development structure, and the indications are that football stadiums are now 'good neighbour' buildings because you get all these good facilities, and generally there's money poured into the transport and infrastructure, so you have more parking, better access and so on. It also becomes a bit of a magnet for the sporting industry and other linked businesses. A stadium can get a million visitors a year, and will get television coverage, which helps people become more aware of the place – both as a location and as a destination."

Sheard says that the biggest challenge posed by Emirates Stadium was solving the "practical problem of squeezing it onto a triangular plot of land right between two railway lines, and then finding out that we had London's biggest sewer running right down the side of it, which we couldn't muck around with, so to speak. As it turned out, though, trying to fit 60,000 people onto the site proved to be a blessing in disguise as it led us to this oval shape that we've got, and the sort of undulating profile at the back of the seating area which we all loved as soon as we saw it. Often we've found that the restrictions that get put on you generate natural, original thinking, which tends to spur people on to find a more creative approach to the problem." It sounds like one of Arsène Wenger's teams, with the emphasis on skill and original thinking.



"The local rules on height restrictions meant that we had to keep the building down to 30 metres," says Sheard. "It's a similar style to the one that we used for the Olympic Stadium in Australia, which worked well acoustically and in terms of the atmosphere, by keeping it very tight. So the combination of a very low-slung roof and the oval shape which generated that undulating profile ... well, the problem became the solution in many ways."

Sheard says that he has learnt over the years not to approach projects with a pre-conceived idea of what he is going to do. "We just work through the site, the plans, and all the possible permutations, and then go from there."

Fortunately, the Club were always decisive about what they did – and didn't – want, or need. "Arsenal always said that they wanted a stadium with a 60,000 capacity, so we had that fixed from the start. And they wanted real grass. Artificial grass is so good these days that you can literally stand on one of these pitches and be unable to tell that it's not grass without bending down and touching it. The players say that it plays just as well, too. Yet having said that, Arsenal, like Wembley, wanted to have natural grass.

"Arsenal also wanted the grass pitch to be fixed. An alternative is to have a moving pitch, like the Millennium Stadium, where the grass is on pallets. It's a system which developed from the 1994 World Cup in the United States. We've done several of these 'palletised' pitches, but it does present its own problems. For a start, there's a pretty big ongoing cost, and there's also the difficulty of finding a place to where you can move the pallets. The Club felt they didn't need a roof which closes: a fixed-grass arena with a closing roof is very difficult - not impossible, but difficult. The Millennium Stadium, in Cardiff, for example, is essentially a concrete arena which has been successful in holding concerts and shows and the like, when the roof can be closed if necessary; the grass is brought in only when it is staging big football or rugby matches.

"If you have fixed grass, you can't just surround the grass with 60,000 seats and then expect it to do what you want – you've got to look after it very intensively. The pitch management process at Arsenal includes using ultra-violet light on the grass, and keeping the roof as low-slung as possible to allow the sun to come in."

Clearly, every stadium presents its own special problems that need to be solved during construction; few people who have visited Emirates Stadium would deny that HOK has been spectacularly successful in overcoming the various challenges that it faced developing the site. Sheard seems to have a soft spot for Emirates Stadium, too. "Selecting a favourite building project is very difficult," he says. "It's like having 10 children and being asked to choose the one you like the best. That said, it's fun to see the faces of all those Tottenham

Hotspur supporters 'enjoying' Emirates Stadium."

Highbury will never be forgotten, and rightly so, but the amazing Emirates Stadium is perfectly placed, in every sense, to take Arsenal on to even greater glories for many years to come.

## The numbers game

- Stadium complex covers 17 acres
- Seating for 60,432 people (Highbury 38,500), including up to 9,000 away fans
- Stadium stretches 245.6 metres from north to south by 199.6 metres east to west
- Grass area stretches 113 metres by 76 metres (Highbury 105 x 70)
- Pitch is 105 metres by 68 metres – a fixed size for all Champions League matches (Highbury 100 x 66.7)
- Total load on the roof of 5,100 tons, including about 3,000 tons from the steel structure and 1,000 tons from the roof fabric
- Stadium has 104 full-height turnstiles, 28 half-height gates and 13 glazed gates, plus 4,500 metres of metal handrailing
- More than 2,000 doors, 100 flights of stairs, 13 lifts, five escalators and 12,000 light fittings
- North Bridge is 75 metres by 14 metres, while South Bridge is more than 100 metres long and 22 metres wide – the width of a three-lane motorway
- Two cast-iron cannons from Woolwich Arsenal, 41 TV camera positions, 215 media seats, 900 toilets, 370 metres of urinals, and 113 disabled facilities (plus a dog toilet for guide dogs)
- There are 475 plasma televisions and 439 high-definition televisions along the general concourse, in Club level and executive boxes, and 450 cash tills
- The Club facilities on Level 1, serving up to 6,700 people, include eight restaurant kitchens, five restaurants, seven lounge bars, four sports bars and a directors' box
- The box facilities, on Level 2, include 75 pantries, eight kitchens serving 150 boxes seating 1,800 spectators
- In the Diamond Club, 168 people are served from a dedicated kitchen; Raymond Blanc is the Signature chef
- Finishes in the Diamond Club include Eucalyptus parquet flooring, walnut, oak, an onyx bar, and limestone toilets and granite stairs

- Bars can pour four pints of beer at once in five seconds – 2,400 pints per minute. The 250 catering outlets expect to provide 100,000 orders for food and drink at each game
- Emirates Stadium cost £390 million. Up to 2,500 legal documents were signed to give the project full clearance
- 150 high-spec executive boxes (48 at Highbury) cost £65,000 to £150,000 for 10 to 15 people. A general season ticket costs from between £885 to £1,825
- Construction: March 1, 2004 to July 14, 2006 (123 weeks, two days). Topping out ceremony on August 15, 2005
- Youngest visitor, prior to first match: Saffron Bergkamp, aged 16 months, July 14, 2006
- *Supplied by Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd*

# Ground-breaker

**The preservation of the magnificent art deco façades of Highbury's East and West stands means that the character of the ground will survive its conversion into apartments**

So Highbury closed its doors on football forever. The last ball had been kicked, the final spectator had drifted away and some brave soul inside the old building, with a heavy heart, turned off the lights for the last time. Within days of the closure in July 2006, Highbury was a building site. But a building site with a difference. Not every last brick, girder and fragment was razed to the ground. The bulldozers were called in, the cranes were sky high, but something tangible of the old stadium remained. Arsenal's home for 93 years would live on, in its own inimitable way.

Six months later you could walk down the road from Finsbury Park station on a winter's day, past the Auld Triangle pub – known as the "uld riangle" on account of the lettering over its door – past the church of St Thomas the Apostle, where so many fans had offered up silent prayers on the way to a game, turn the corner into Avenell Road and for one fleeting second it was as though time had stood still. Highbury was still there, the East Stand rising proudly from the pavement, but the illusion was swiftly dispelled by the giant carcass of metalwork holding the sliver of the stadium's old façade in place. The eyes were blind, the windows removed. Through the gaps in the masonry all you could see was air and dust stirred by the grinding machinery.

It was the same the other side. The West Stand's façade held in place, all alone but for its scaffolding, while the diggers and builders reduced the rest of the stadium to rubble. The old entrance to the North Bank, where young Charlie George, among many others, had once shuffled his way through the turnstiles, was now home to a gang of men in hard hats. Three gigantic cranes dominated the skyline, sparks flew, drills droned and a security guard stood eyeing the scene, eating breakfast from a tub with a plastic fork.

Just a job? Yet not really. Not a job so much as a sacred enterprise had been entrusted into their hands. Arsenal had been ambitious. It would have been so very much easier, so very much cheaper to demolish Highbury completely. Instead, the East Stand, the West Stand and the incomparable Marble Halls (complete with staircase) had been treated with the reverence druids reserve for Stonehenge. It was, after all, a similar place of worship for many.

Listed Building requirements demanded that the East Stand façade of the stadium be preserved for posterity, but sheer love, affection, nostalgia and shared

history might have led to the same end whether the planners had insisted or not. Arsenal fans wanted to believe that, anyway. It was unthinkable that the stadium could vanish without trace. Instead Highbury was being dismantled and then cunningly rebuilt into a remarkable set of apartments, resting on the footprint of the old stadium. A clever plan and strangely reassuring to those many fans genuinely sorrowful to say goodbye to the place after almost a century.

Unimaginable on that winter's day was the pristine, modern, feng shui-friendly structure that would ultimately rise from the concrete rubble to create 704 apartments – 649 at market prices and 55 affordable flats, ready for occupancy by 2009. Around the corner at Highbury House, the new office block created alongside Emirates Stadium to house Arsenal's administrative staff, there was on display a model of the project as conceived by the architects. Central to the conception was faithfulness. In the middle of Highbury Square was a green space, the dimensions marked out by a white line. It was by no means a coincidence that the white line represented the rectangle of the old pitch. This would be the garden, destined to be filled with trees, shrubs, flowers, grass and 15-foot high fluorescent waterfalls, a space paying homage to a pitch that had hosted the feet of great players, from Alex James to Frank McLintock to Thierry Henry.

The East Stand was still fronted by its art deco façade, the words "ARSENAL STADIUM" still visibly trumpeting its heritage. Many of the flats had pitch-facing balconies and an extraordinary triplex down the side would feature the massive fantail windows through which those standing on the North Bank could watch the citizens of the East Stand making their way to their seats. Or, on a bad day, making their way from the seats. Underneath the old pitch there used to be pipes for the undersoil heating. Now the arrangements underground are a little more exotic: car parking, a gym and a swimming pool.

The North Bank and South Bank had been completely demolished and replaced by a more traditional block of flats, augmented by their own area of garden and memories of the feet that had trampled across the terraces. Selling the properties has been no problem, not even the four-bedroom penthouses on the market for £1.5 million. Within weeks of going on sale and at least three years before they would be ready for occupation, Arsenal had sold 80 per cent of the apartments. One of them, mysteriously, to a greengrocer from Tottenham.

Architecturally, it was a challenge. One readily taken up by Chris Bearman, of architects Allies and Morrison, who had history with Arsenal: his father had taken him to Highbury in the mid-Sixties to watch Peter Simpson make his debut in an Arsenal versus Chelsea derby. The team were not very good in those days, but good enough to impress a young boy. "Highbury looked awesome to me,

bearing in mind I was only nine at the time. It was massively impressive. But at that age I don't think I was appreciating it in purely architectural terms."

He would later though when Arsenal came to him with their plans for the conversion. "As we became more and more involved we realised that while the East Stand was listed and the West Stand was not, it was far better to treat them similarly. It was very important to preserve the art deco status. Arsenal's first idea had been to keep the East Stand and erect a lower-scale building on the other side. But we suggested they also keep the West Stand to preserve the scale and sense of Highbury as an arena."

The next problem was how to enclose those new apartments that would be facing the garden-pitch. "We came up with the solution to build a façade of glass, as fine as possible, to maximise the light. If you looked through the glass from the garden, you could see the stairwells between the apartments, reminiscent of the old stadium steps, an echo of the past. We put thought into everything, even whether we should paint the window frames red as they were when Highbury closed or green as they used to be. All in all, it was quite a jigsaw puzzle, but a massively satisfying one."

The garden designer, Christopher Bradley Hole, had been worried by aspects of the project. Not least, turning up at Highbury in its final days as a stadium with a camera to take photographs from every angle. "I thought people would think I was a bit weird. But there were hundreds of people doing the same thing. They were paying homage, preserving memories. I realised there was something very special about the place."

He had been given a rare insight into that fact many years before when he turned up at Highbury as a Brighton and Hove Albion supporter to watch his team play their first match in the First Division. They lost 4-0, with Liam Brady running riot for Arsenal. Despite this painful history, Bradley Hole set about the task of converting the Highbury pitch into the first major new London square of the 21st century. "We wanted to preserve the old dimensions of the pitch, so we decided to mark the margins in white stone. At either end, we planned to put steel portals into the building area, at the North and South Bank end. They would be like goal posts, in effect.

"We decided to turn the pitch into a series of incidents and provide different experiences. A number of the glass hedges were actually the ventilation shafts from the car park, so they were functional as well as decorative. They would be lit at night for a very dramatic effect. The old penalty areas were designed to be the most active areas, replicating the old days of action on the pitch. But we replaced Jens Lehmann and Thierry Henry with perennial plants, gravel terraces and 150 different types of tree."

By the time Highbury closed, Bradley Hole had been working on his concept for two years and the £2.5 million project was born out of his appreciation of the stadium created by Herbert Chapman. "Aesthetically, it was just incredibly inspiring. Although I was never allowed to walk on the pitch by the groundsman." Some things never change.

The would-be residents were the lucky ones. One new apartment owner staking his claim to hallowed ground was black cab driver Stephen Nicholas who was living out a long-held dream. "I'll never forget going to my first match when I was 11. I thought I could play a bit, so I walked up the steps to the doors to the Marble Halls and asked the commissioner if I could get a game. He gently turned me away and told me to join the Junior Gunners.

"We had a great team in those days: Charlie Nic, Rocky, Rixsy. All those trophies under George Graham. I'm a season-ticket holder now and maybe it seems a little bit childish saying this, but having a flat at Highbury is magical to me. I've driven round once or twice to have a look at how it's coming along, but it looks rather ghostly at the moment. It's like nothing ever happened there. It makes you feel sick, really, to think of all that's gone, but when it's rebuilt that feeling will change. I've got a flat that looks out over Avenell Road, above the letters that spell out Arsenal Football Stadium. My entrance – this is what sold it to me – is through those Marble Halls. Can you imagine what it will be like the first time I stroll in and the commissioner says: 'Good Evening, Mr. Nicholas.' It might be 25 years late but my dream will finally have come true."

Perhaps the most romantic story attached to Highbury Square came not from London at all but from across the Irish Sea where David Hunter, a Belfast-based Arsenal supporter, spent many a sleepless night wondering whether he had just done something completely and dangerously insane. To understand exactly what happened, it's necessary to backtrack a little. He was nine years old in 1971 when he and his father were invited to watch the FA Cup Final between Arsenal and Liverpool on the only colour television in the area, at the Royal British Legion Club. From that moment on, he supported Arsenal. Deeply, passionately, superstitiously. This was the sort of man who wore the identity bracelet he owned as a child to watch the 2007 Carling Cup Final in case it brought the boys luck (It didn't). "It was quite a struggle to get it on to my wrist, but I had to do it," Hunter said.

For him in Belfast, every home game was an away game, necessitating a round trip of more than 600 miles, beginning at the crack of dawn, ending late at night, and often with no way of knowing whether he would be able to get a ticket to see the game at all. "I leave the house at 4.45am, catch the 6.30am flight to Luton, take the train into London, go to the game, take the Tube back to King's



Cross, up to Luton, back in Belfast by quarter to 10. Commonsense doesn't come into it," he said. "You couldn't do it if it wasn't for love.

"The problem was I couldn't get a season ticket. I was on the waiting list for years. One day I noticed in a newspaper that the Highbury apartments were going up for sale and that those lucky enough to buy one would also be entitled to one or two season tickets. The thought of becoming an Arsenal season-ticket holder became an obsession."

The means to the end was a one-bedroom apartment at £295,000. "My wife thought I was a complete maniac. She didn't want to know how much it cost either. She still doesn't. But she said that as I had always looked after the family, she trusted me to do the right thing."

He may be an extreme fan, Hunter, but he's by no means the only one: crying the day Highbury closed was a common experience.

By the early 21st century, when Highbury closed, football was a thoroughly slick, toned and professional business. It always had been, in a way. Sir Henry Norris had certainly thought so. As had that great visionary, Herbert Chapman. And Bertie Mee and George Graham and Arsène Wenger. But the history of Highbury would not have unfolded as it did – complete with glory, tragedy, magnificence and pain – were it not for another ingredient. Thierry Henry would not have broken his records, Ian Wright's electric grin would have stayed stubbornly hidden, Tony Adams's heroic captaincy would have failed, Frank McLintock would never have won his finals, Charlie George would have remained just a kid on the North Bank, the great entertainer Alex James would just be a name in the Scottish record books. None of this would have happened if, in Hunter's words, "it wasn't for love".

Highbury was a much-loved home for 93 years and the adventures it shared with the supporters and the players of Arsenal Football Club would endure – long after the curtains were up in Highbury Square.

**Sue Mott**

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**End matter**

# Contributors

## Sue Mott

Sue Mott first set eyes on Charlie George in the Arsenal Reserves in 1970. That was enough. She became a lifelong Arsenal supporter.

Her career in sports journalism began at Nottingham University (where Brian Clough was the manager with Nottingham Forest), and continued to the *Hull Daily Mail* (where Hull City were relegated to Division Four), and the United States (where Franz Beckenbauer was playing for the New York Cosmos, George Best for the San Jose Earthquakes and rather ageing remnants of Derby County for the Seattle Sounders). She then transferred to Australia (the football team took Scotland close in a World Cup qualifier) before moving back to Britain, where she covered tennis and football for *The Sunday Times*. She currently writes for *The Daily Telegraph*, as a weekly sports columnist and interviewer.

She has covered three World Cups and three Olympic Games, plus the major events in tennis, rugby, golf, cricket, yachting, rowing and, once, pigeon racing. She co-presented the BBC television sports news programme, *On The Line*, and is a regular broadcast journalist on both television and radio.

She was the author of the book, *A Girl's Guide To Ball Games*, shortlisted for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award, and was voted Sports Feature Writer of the Year in 1996.

Like many Arsenal supporters, the emotional bond with Highbury remains strong.

## Alan Smith

After being spotted playing for non-league Alvechurch in 1982, Alan Smith's professional career began at Leicester City, where he quickly forged a fruitful

attacking partnership with Gary Lineker. On Lineker's departure, Smith (pictured below in the dressing room at Highbury shortly before the ground's closure) took over the main goalscoring burden until relegation caught up with the Foxes.

By this time, however, Smith had already become George Graham's first major signing for Arsenal in an unusual agreement (since made illegal) that saw him loaned back to Leicester for the remainder of that campaign.

Once permanently installed at Highbury, though, the rangy striker became a key part of Graham's ambitious plans. After scoring in the League Cup Final defeat to Luton Town in 1988, he led the line with distinction the following season. On a momentous night at Anfield, Smith scored the first goal before setting up Michael Thomas for a last-gasp second, ending up, in the process, as the First Division's top scorer. Two years later, the centre-forward picked up another Golden Boot as Arsenal became champions again.

Further honours followed with the 1993 League Cup and FA Cup Double before Smith notched what was, perhaps, the most famous goal of his entire career with the winner against Parma in the 1994 European Cup Winners' Cup Final. But it proved his parting shot, for 12 months later, with 13 England caps on the sideboard, a knee injury forced the 32 year-old into premature retirement.

Since then, Smith has forged a successful career in the media. He combines regular columns and interviews for *The Daily Telegraph* with commentary duties for Sky Sports.

## David Miller

A keen sportsman, over the years David Miller played football for Charterhouse, Public Schools XIs, Cambridge University, British Universities, Corinthian Casuals, Pegasus, Portsmouth FC (3rd XI), England Amateur XI, and was coached by Norman Creek, of Corinthian fame, Bill Nicholson, Joe Mercer and Arthur Rowe.

He was also a member of the British Olympic training squad for Melbourne 1956, and a hurdler and javelin thrower for Cambridge University and Achilles Club.

Miller started work as a sub-editor on *The Times* in 1956, and went on to be chief football correspondent of the newly launched *Sunday Telegraph* in 1961, chief sports correspondent of the *Daily Express* and then of *The Times*, before returning in 1997 as a freelance writer at *The Daily Telegraph*. He has covered 13 World Cup final competitions, received the FIFA Jules Rimet Centenary

Award in 2004, written four books on the World Cup – 1970, 1974, 1978 and 1982 – and biographies of Sir Matt Busby and Sir Stanley Matthews.

Miller has attended 19 summer and winter Olympic Games, written biographies of Sebastian Coe and Juan Antonio Samaranch and six books on the Olympics. Now semi-retired in Norfolk, he sails, quietly, plays golf even more quietly, and is president of Old Carthusian FC, the FA Cup winners in 1881.

# Postscript

## About The Official Arsenal Opus eBook Edition, and a look back at the publication behind it

We conceived it as "the ultimate story of Arsenal Football Club", focusing on the Highbury years from 1913 to 2006 and the move to Emirates Stadium, celebrating the achievements of the past and heralding the promise of a golden future for the club.

Opus began working closely with the club in 2005 and it was almost two years of dedicated research, writing, editing and photography before we were ready to release the *Arsenal Opus*, which followed our previous Opus publications for Manchester United and Super Bowl.

The history of Arsenal FC had never been told before in such depth, and we were incredibly grateful to the cast of Arsenal legends past and present who lent us their time for interviews and photo-shoots. We were also lucky to bring on board writers and contributors best-placed from years of experience covering sport at the highest level to offer a fresh take on Arsenal's illustrious history. These included Sue Mott, one of our foremost sports journalists and writers (and Arsenal supporter) and fine sportswriters David Miller and Patrick Barclay, while ex-Arsenal player-turned-journalist Alan Smith's relationship with the club and players brought us the inside story on some of Arsenal's most important figures and moments.

As with all our titles, *The Official Arsenal Opus* was released as a limited-edition super-sized publication in 2007, signed by Arsène Wenger and other Club legends, its sheer scale making the most of the thousands of images accompanying the words and telling the Club's story in an epic, cinematic style.

## Opus eBook Editions

Each *Opus eBook Edition* distils the story of an Opus by taking selected text - and sometimes the complete text - from the original publication and bringing it to your eReader, allowing to you experience Opus wherever and whenever you choose.

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