

NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

**BURNLEY'S INCREDIBLE
1959/60 LEAGUE TITLE
WINNING TRIUMPH**



TIM QUELCH

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Introduction

Back to the Future

PROFESSIONAL football's major prizes are now the monopoly of a select few. If the biggest are not always the best, then the exceptions are few and far between. But in what now seems a faraway place in time, the smallest could still aspire to be great.

Join me now as we spin backwards in our rickety time machine. We are returning to a time when the recently-opened Preston by-pass (now part of the M6) heralded the start of the motorway age. But only a sparse parade of vehicles – Ford Anglias, Triumph Heralds and Morris Minors among them – can be seen on its three-lane blacktop. It is also a time when Cliff Richard, our Elvis copyist, has just enjoyed his first number one hit with 'Living Doll'.

So take note now as our machine emerges from the sulphurous mists, juddering to a halt in a cobbled, terraced street, its Pennine stone houses blackened by the fumes of so many mill chimneys. The place is Burnley. The time is August 1959. It's bright and hot. The sun is so strong it easily pierces the thin, yellowed industrial haze. There's hardly a breath of air. Craig Douglas is on the radio and the week's washing is on the clothes lines. Sheets and shirts hang limply from the pleated ropes that criss-cross the street. Young girls are playing hopscotch, others are clattering around in oversized shoes and their mothers' cast-off dresses and hats – a grotesque sense of theatre. There are boys here, too, dressed in aertex shirts and short grey trousers that are held up by twisted elastic belts with snake clasps. Their twin-hooped grey socks have fallen carelessly, bunching around their ankles. One starts a card game, tossing a Chix bubblegum card onto the ground. A portrait of Jimmy Greaves stares up at them from

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the cobbles as another boy tries to claim the card by flicking one of his own, a picture of Tom Finney, in its direction, trying to cover it. He fails. Yet another boy joins the game sucking on a liquorice straw, thrust into his sherbet fountain.

Footballers are their icons. But it is the Clarets who monopolise local reverence. The boys all have portraits of their favourites pasted into their sugar paper scrapbooks or taped to their bedroom walls – Ray Pointer, Jimmy McIlroy, Jimmy Adamson and others – cut from their copies of *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly*, *Soccer Star* or *Reynold's News*. They have their league ladders as well – free gifts from the *Tiger* comic. As the new Football League season is about to be unveiled, all four divisions have their t-cards in place, primed for the first round of results. The boys have dug out their flip flop autograph books, too, ready for when the first visiting team coach pulls up outside the club entrance in Brunshaw Road. Their Ian Allan ABC locospotter guides will then become of secondary importance.

Very soon now, these boys will resume their place among Turf Moor's 27,000 throng; a crowd that amounts to a third of the local population. This staggering proportion is twice that found at an average First Division club of the time. For these boys, the club is a barometer of their town's importance. They reason that because their team is a force in the land so must their town be also. They are unaware that no town as small as theirs now is has ever won the First Division. They are oblivious of the fact that Burnley has lost a fifth of the population it had when it previously won the First Division championship. That was back in 1921 before the inter-war recession undermined the prosperity of the town's traditional industries – cotton and coal. They are unconcerned that the local mills and mines are continuing to decline. Their older brothers have already moved away in search of better job prospects, but they are happy with their lot. They know their team is among the best in Britain and maybe in Europe, too. With the club's totemic floodlight pylons shimmering in the glare of the day's sun, they are confident, perhaps complacent, too, that their club is forever blessed, destined always to be giants. This season they will be rewarded with a rare triumph, an incredible victory but these boys will take this herculean performance slightly for granted. Only when they become much, much older will they realise the enormity of what was achieved.

This book is an account of a remarkable club and an even more remarkable team, with the players who pulled off this improbable

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championship telling a substantial part of the story. How good were that Burnley team which lifted the First Division championship in 1959/60?

Jimmy Greaves, a brilliant inside-forward with Chelsea, Spurs and England spoke of his respect for Burnley's smooth, skilful style of play, describing it as 'poetic', epitomising the best of British football. He complimented the Burnley team on their tactical innovations, such as the quick, short corner and a bewildering array of 'free-kick scams', crediting Alan Brown, their former manager, for pioneering these. Greaves said that, even in defeat, he was moved to praise Burnley's creative talent, remarking that at a time when the big boot held sway, they were 'a league of gentlemen'. Eamon Dunphy, a former Millwall and Republic of Ireland midfielder, author and broadcaster, was equally enthusiastic, describing Burnley's continental style of playing as 'cultured', drawing attention to the skill of Jimmy McIlroy, their urbane playmaker.

This apparently unfashionable and declining town boasted a team which delivered modern, tactically astute and enterprising football. Of all the First Division sides of 1959/60, probably only Burnley and Spurs were able to match the standard of the best Spanish and Italian sides of their day. Although Burnley's players demonstrated their tactical astuteness in a series of well-rehearsed dead-ball routines, tactics were never employed as a substitute for skill. A high premium was always placed upon improving ball skills, underpinned by fluidity of movement and by swiftness and sudden changes of pace. Unsurprisingly, the Burnley team acquitted itself well in the European Cup competition of 1960/61 and failed by the narrowest of margins to qualify for the semi-finals. Perhaps significantly, Spurs, whose style of play was so similar to Burnley, would become the first English side to win a European trophy, when they lifted the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1963.

But this is also a book about a very different time, before global finance and the international power of television had any bearing on the strength of football clubs and their consequent fortunes. This was when the maximum wage was still in place and before the top clubs had encountered foreign oligarchies, satellite TV, pay-per-view, executive boxes, agents, 'tapping up', 'bungs', spread betting, drugs tests and 'simulation'. Sporting achievements are understood better when placed in the context of surrounding events. As well as considering the tactics, coaching and training techniques employed by clubs of the time, and

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how it was to be a top professional footballer over half a century ago, we shall also look at what life was like in Britain more generally, and how the fortunes were changing for the town of Burnley while this heroic success was being achieved. The aim is to examine as well as celebrate a remarkable triumph and to evoke warmth of nostalgia among those who lived through these times and create a vivid sense of history for those who did not.

Chapter I

'Absolute Beginners'

The way we were before the sixties swung

IN the immediate post-war years, Britain seemed exhausted by the social and economic dislocation brought about by World War Two. The pound had been drastically devalued in relation to the dollar, losing 30% of its former value, as Britain struggled to regain economic sustainability. Rationing was not finally eliminated until 1954. Despite this, many leading politicians and military chiefs maintained that Britain was still a major power. It still held a world policing role and, despite the independence granted to India and Pakistan in 1947, its Empire was largely intact.

As the fifties drew to a close, Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who had succeeded Anthony Eden on his resignation in January 1957, insisted that most Britons had 'never had it so good'. But despite Britain's apparent economic recovery in the late fifties, it was in fact regressing on the world stage. Its productivity had grown by just 21% during the decade, compared with the 84% growth achieved by West Germany and the 62% growth achieved by Italy. Moreover, the other defeated Axis power, Japan, realised an incredible 300% growth between 1951 and 1964, during which time Britain's growth was a comparatively paltry 40%. Exports showed a similar profile. Despite a claim, made in *The Economist* in 1954, that Britain's 'economic miracle' had been achieved without inflation, the average weekly wage in Britain had increased by almost 75% between 1950 and 1959, rising

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from £6/8 shillings (£6-40p) to £11/2 shillings 6 pence (£11-12p). As Margaret Thatcher would chide us twenty years later, Britons were paying themselves more for producing less. In this case, 'less' meant less than our rivals.

In the face of the 'never had it so good' message, Britain's traditional industries – steel, shipbuilding, textiles, heavy manufacturing and coal mining – were being undermined increasingly by foreign competition and by outdated production methods and restrictive practices. Through increasing modernisation, greater innovation, better use of new technology and more efficient management of labour and material resources, growing numbers of developing countries, including our recent foes, were catching up with, or actually overtaking us.

In addition, the growing affluence of the late fifties did not bless all Britons. By 1962, 42% of employees still earned under £10 per week. Nevertheless, many more homes had improved amenities. Bathrooms had become more of a standard feature, dispensing with our need of the weekly fireside bath. Electricity had replaced both downstairs gas lighting and bedtime candles, although many of the older properties still had outside toilets. With our basic comforts in better shape, many found that there was greater scope for luxuries.

By 1960, 3.5 million Britons could afford a Mediterranean holiday. Private transport had become more affordable, too. A down payment of just £4/8 shillings (£4-40p) would secure a Ford Popular saloon on a hire-purchase agreement; only £1/5 shillings (£1-25p) more than was required for the first instalment on a fridge. With the introduction of the new Mini saloon in 1959, the range of affordable small cars expanded. Car ownership increased by 250% during the decade. As a consequence, rail patronage fell away sharply, causing the network to quiver in expectation of Beeching's axe. Nevertheless, Hornby Dublo and Triang electric train sets remained popular among schoolboys, at least for those whose families had progressed beyond gas power.

Irrespective of what Imperial die-hards like Viscount Montgomery of Alamein chose to think or say, by 1959, Britain was no longer a leading world power, having been utterly humiliated at Suez in 1956. British troops did all that was asked of them, converting a poorly-coordinated operation into a certain military victory, but with the country's balance of payments in such a poor state, the United States were able to call, or more to the point, stop the shots. US support for Britain's bid for International Monetary Fund assistance was made conditional upon our prior military withdrawal, meaning the campaign ended less like

the snarl of the British bulldog and more like the yap of a poodle. A contemporary US politician, Dean Acheson observed in 1962 that: 'Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.'

Still, millions of pounds were wasted in developing an independent nuclear deterrent as if it was essential to demonstrate that Britain was still a global military and political power. Not even the growing Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) movement, led by the likes of Canon Collins, Bertrand Russell and Michael Foot, could shift government thinking. CND made little impact upon most of the population. Seduced by the trappings of affluence and suspicious of 'a movement of eggheads for eggheads', when it came to marched protests the working classes largely voted with their feet up.

One potential way forward was to develop new continental markets with European partners, but the government was reluctant to forge new partnerships outside our existing circles. Despite joining the new, but decidedly 'second division', European Free Trade Association in November 1959, most politicians remained sceptical of the benefits of a pan-European trading alliance, preferring to stick with our tried and trusted Commonwealth ties. This reluctance was partly a product of suspicion, or plain fear of being taken over, invasion by the economic back door, well encapsulated in Attlee's acid remark about the European Economic Community (EEC): 'very recently this country spent a great deal of blood and treasure, rescuing four of 'em from attacks by the other two.' More far-sighted politicians such as the Labour Party's George Brown and the Conservative Party's Ted Heath were in a minority when it came to forging closer links with Europe. As for the wider British public, an opinion poll conducted in late 1957 suggested that most of the electorate were either indifferent or hostile to the prospect of joining the EEC.

Had Britain been quicker about varying and modernising its economy, the country might sooner have put itself back on a sounder footing. By 1959, traditional industries had a limited shelf life but the country seemed reluctant to explore possible alternatives. Instead heads were being firmly placed in the sand. By the end of the fifties Britain was complacently enjoying the benefits of a boom, as short-lived as this proved to be, assuring itself of 'greatness' with a succession of self-reverential war dramas, like *Reach for the Sky*, which celebrated pluck and indomitable strength against unappealing odds. The growing popularity of Ian Fleming's Bond novels reflected a similar determination to place Brits 'on top', through a fantasy of superior

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British wit and courage confounding all, underpinned, even more improbably, by superior British technology. Naturally, Soviet and American agents were compelled to give way. Ironically, our record in post-war espionage was pretty dismal, scarred as it was with the highly damaging defections of MacLean, Burgess and Philby. There were other national security disasters, too, involving the likes of George Blake, the Krogers, John Vassall, Greville Wynne and 'Buster' Crabbe. Far from being the slick, smooth, glitzy operations evoked by James Bond, life in the secret services seemed much more akin to the grimy, austere tales of chilly mistrust presented in the convoluted plots of John Le Carré. Even our rebellious youth of the fifties, as represented by the 'Teddy boys', seemed to be hankering for a time of lost glory, not only by adopting the fashion of a pre-First World War age, but also by attacking with parochial and jealous fervour London's growing cosmopolitanism, as demonstrated, for example, by their part in the 1958 Notting Hill Riots. As the fifties drew to a close, misty-eyed conservatism was rife in Britain.

There were indications that Britain recognised the days of Empire were passing. Macmillan's 'Winds of Change' speech in February 1960 conveyed that message forcibly, although its principal target seemed to be apartheid-obsessed South Africa. Empire Day had been re-tagged as Commonwealth Day in 1958 and, within the following five years, independence was granted to a majority of former colonies. Other improvements were made, such as educational prospects, particularly at the higher university level, although, arguably, insufficient emphasis was placed upon developing scientific skills. Greater efficiencies were sought, as in the railways and mines, for example. And yet it seemed as if Britain was being held back by parochial, staid and reactionary attitudes. Even some of the 'New Wave' authors and film makers, far from being the voices of a more liberated future, seemed stuck in a male, white-dominated, discriminative past. It was as if they, too, were reflecting male disquiet about the growing emancipation of women from household drudgery and 'Little Englander' concerns about increasing cosmopolitanism. Perhaps, though, the social and moral conservatism of the time is best symbolised by the Crown's decision to charge Penguin books with obscenity for daring to print *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Although the prosecution was almost certainly guided by a need to limit the excesses of the existing obscenity laws, the arguments put forward in court surely highlighted the fustiness of Establishment thinking in 1960. This was no better exemplified than

by the prosecuting counsel’s summing up. He asked the members of the jury: ‘Is it a book you would wish your wife or servants to read?’

Britain had undergone significant changes during the fifties, which affected what we ate, wore, watched, read, played at and listened to, and yet by 1959 the nation remained in the grip of a staid and snobbish class divide which impeded its growth – commercially, politically and on the sports field. In his book, *Anatomy of Britain*, Anthony Sampson provided a seminal analysis of the archaic, privileged political and social networks that dominated British life at the beginning of the 1960s. He concluded that, although Britain was generally a happy place in which to live, having justly achieved a reputation for civility and a humane outlook, its commercial progress was being held back by a lack of ambition and efficiency, and anachronistic and nepotistic practices. What happened during the sixties helped erode this complacent conservatism. Growing disenchantment with the ‘old school tie’ cartel operating at the heart of government released a cascade of iconoclasm and satire as illustrated by the *Beyond the Fringe* revue, the mocking BBC TV show, *That Was the Week That Was*, and the scrappy first editions of *Private Eye*. So, on the eve of the ‘swinging sixties’, were too many of us thinking that the only thing to look forward to was the past?

Without doubt a major catalyst for change was the infiltration of American culture. Its influence had been growing for decades. This is best illustrated by the case of popular music. Noel Coward and Ivor Novello had drawn heavily upon Broadway musicals during the 20s and 30s, although it was American Big Band music which really turned the British public onto stateside sounds. This followed Benny Goodman’s highly successful UK tour of 1935. Wartime broadcasts only intensified British enthusiasm for swing and jazz.

Nevertheless, in the immediate post-war period there were serious misgivings within the BBC about the prospect of American stars dominating our popular cultural life. For much of post-war radio music was an uninspiring mixture of brass bands, church choirs, Gilbert and Sullivan, light classics, novelty songs, folk ballads and romantic crooners. Essentially, this was bland, inoffensive music for a generic audience, one in which adult and younger tastes remained undifferentiated. It therefore made perfect sense for the BBC to call its record request show *Family Favourites*.

The emergence of rock ‘n’ roll created an appetite for change at least among the younger generation. Their increasing affluence created the market in which the music could prosper. With the medium adjusting

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to the message, this exciting new brand of music was recorded on smaller 45 rpm discs. In 1955, one year after American Bill Haley had recorded *Shake, Rattle and Roll*, four million of these discs were sold in Britain. By 1960, that number had shot up to 52 million. But it was hardly a 'Youthquake', in which the staid old order was overturned by the vibrancy of the new. Five years after *Rock Around The Clock* was released, BBC light entertainment was still dominated by a clutch of crooners, big band singers and show guys and dolls. Even during the swinging sixties, the best-selling albums included *The Sound of Music*, *West Side Story* and *South Pacific*.

In staid Britain, the new 'rip it up' music, performed by the likes of Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Gene Vincent stirred up an unholy moral panic, just as the Sex Pistols did twenty years later. In early 1956, the *Daily Mail* reflected the unease of its more uptight readership in describing rock 'n' roll as 'tribal, possibly the Negro's revenge.' Certainly, on BBC radio, rock 'n' roll was treated as if belonging to an alien or pariah culture, being given brief exposure on *Pick of the Pops* before being pushed back into a dark corner.

Television was not nearly as inhibited as its radio sibling. In February 1957, *Six-Five Special* began its two-year run on BBC, attracting up to ten million viewers. Here, we had the excruciating embarrassment of DJ Pete Murray strafing us with catchphrases of the day – 'cool cats' 'having a ball'. If Grannie could take a trip then Auntie knew where it was at. Not to be outdone, the ITV launched its punchier *Oh Boy!* in June 1958, with Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde its regular stars. *Juke Box Jury* was also launched in June 1959, with compère David Jacobs demonstrating the pop credentials of an anthropologist.

If you listened to *Two-Way Family Favourites* on a typical Sunday lunchtime in 1959 you were much more likely to hear some anodyne swing or bubbly banality from Alma Cogan or Rosemary Clooney, than the raunchy shrieks of Little Richard or the nasal hiccuping of Buddy Holly. If you were after Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf or Chuck Berry you had no chance. If you were after Ray Charles you might be lucky, but if you were seeking Miles Davis or Billie Holiday you were bound to be disappointed.

Rock 'n' roll's rougher edges had almost disappeared by the time that 'the day the music died' in 1959. That was when Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper perished in a plane crash. Jerry Lee Lewis had been ostracised following his marriage to his 13 year-old cousin. Chuck Berry had been arrested for an offence with an

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under-age girl. Little Richard had turned to his church and Elvis had been conscripted, to re-emerge a year later as more of a crooner than a gyrating rocker. Larry Parnes had assembled his stable of British performers giving them ‘stud-like’ monikers such as ‘Fury’, ‘Steele’ and ‘Wilde’ to play upon and excite pubescent sexual fantasies but much of what was around was safe and sleekly packaged. Take the array of slickly dressed and coiffured US teen idols such as Bobby Darrin, Paul Anka, Fabian, Edd ‘Kookie’ Byrnes (from the US TV detective series, *77 Sunset Strip*), Pat Boone and Frankie Avalon. This lot were never going to ‘rip it up’. Apart from ‘Sweet’ Gene Vincent, Cliff Richard, with his plagiarised lip curl, was about as wild as they came. No wonder so many turned to ‘Trad. Jazz.’ But pop is about makeovers. Just as Reginald Smith became Marty Wilde and Terry Nelhams became Adam Faith, so our R’n’B bands became world beaters by nicking and re-inventing Black American blues. We no longer needed imported oldies like Johnnie Ray or Bill Haley for our kids to wet their pants. We had our Fab Four.

In 1959, in the face of rapidly-changing times, the town of Burnley was caught up in a dilemma about how it should sustain its future. Reflecting the misgivings we had as a nation, there were concerns about relinquishing that which had made the town successful – textiles and coal.

The Industrial Revolution had converted Burnley from a small, quiet, out-of-the-way market town into the world’s largest producer of cotton cloth. Its typically damp atmosphere was conducive to the manufacture of cotton fibre, which quickly displaced wool as the number one textile when British colonial markets opened up a massive export trade for light cloth. Moreover, the ready availability of local coal – by 1800, there were a dozen pits in the centre of town alone – meant that Burnley was ripe for rapid industrialisation. Its population grew from 10,000 in 1801 to 21,000 in 1851 before expanding prodigiously to 106,322 by 1911.

The town’s football fortunes reflected its increasing economic prosperity, with its premier team capable of attracting the best talent in the country in the early twentieth century. In 1914, Burnley won the FA Cup for the first and only time in its history, defeating Liverpool 1-0 at the Crystal Palace ground in the final. Shortly after the First World War, Burnley won the English First Division for the first time. However, the tide of prosperity had begun to ebb by the time hostilities ended in 1918. With the textile trade and coal mining stuttering during

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the inter-war depression years, the town's population fell by almost 20% between 1921 and 1939.

Helped by post-war modernisation in both the mills and the pits, there was a brief recovery during the early fifties, with almost full employment once again achieved, but even the introduction of cheap labour, recruited from the Indian sub-continent from the early fifties onwards, could only defer but not prevent the abdication of 'King Cotton'. Ultimately, there was no way of competing with low cost Far Eastern production. As a consequence, the town's population continued to decline, falling by a further 5% between 1951 and 1961.

With the sixties just around the corner, some mill owners and local politicians thought that the cotton trade could still be salvaged through new technology and increasing specialisation, while morale-boosting lectures were given about the continued importance of coal. It was thought that the production of items such as aircraft components, fridges and tyres offered a viable alternative to the languishing cotton trade, despite growing evidence that manufactured commodities could be produced more cheaply abroad.

But it wasn't all about local people being too rooted in their past. There were those who were looking to uncouple the town from its Victorian image and place it more firmly on a modern footing: a thoroughly modern mill town. Whatever view is taken about the value of those efforts now, the plans for the reconstruction of the town centre, drafted in 1959-60, were an expression of a well-intentioned, progressive desire.

It would be wrong to give the impression that the town was resting upon its laurels and not embracing change. A variety of new manufacturers had been attracted to the area including Lucas (aerospace components), Mullards (electrical components), Belling (electric cookers), Michelin (tyres), Rolls-Royce (at Barnoldswick) and Rover (at Clitheroe). Moreover, cotton manufacturers had consolidated, diversified and specialised to meet the new economic climate, also commencing production of man-made fibres.

In 1959, the arguments ranged back and forth about what should be done. Attempts were made to enlist government assistance in attracting new industry to the town but the government would not act while the employment figures were so high. However, it was clear to local MPs that these figures falsified the true situation. Mills were closing rapidly, but in order to honour outstanding orders a number of them would run double shifts staffed with temporary labour. The high rate

of closure was encouraged by the government’s Cotton Industry Act which provided financial inducements to owners to scrap their looms and ‘weave out’. New jobs were not being created at the speed at which old ones were being lost and the temporary employment arrangements were merely disguising that fact.

Seen from the heights of its surrounding moors, Burnley seemed to be thriving in 1959. As Burnley supporter Lester Davidson recalled: ‘In 1960 you could still see at least 14 mill chimneys in Burnley in any direction you cared to look.’ This was no museum. An industrial pall still hung over the town with fumes belching from these chimneys. The new factories hummed and clattered with activity, and the hoppy aroma from Massey’s Brewery still scented the Burnley air. Meanwhile, panting, clanking coal trains continued to struggle up Copy Pit, their hoarse whistles echoing across the valley, just as they had done over the previous 100 years.

As much as the local paper talked up Burnley’s brighter future prospects, it was difficult to escape the fact that the town’s traditional industries were in various stages of retreat, and its new ones stamped with a limited life span. With Burnley positioned precariously away from the main national transport networks, new trade was difficult to attract and many of the manufacturers which moved into Burnley after 1959, such as Michelin, would succumb to declining economic fortunes in the ensuing decades. Coal mining disappeared entirely when the last deep coal mine at Hapton Valley Colliery closed in February 1981. The last steam-powered cotton mill, Queen Street Mill, Briercliffe, shut down its looms in 1982 and Burnley’s two largest manufacturers also closed their factories at the turn of the century: Prestige in July 1997 and Michelin in April 2002.

The town has struggled to recover: its employment statistics between 1995 and 2004 placed it 55th of England’s 56 largest towns and cities and in 2007 it was the 21st most deprived local authority (out of 354) in the United Kingdom.

If Britain’s traditional heavy and manufacturing industries were at the cusp of terminal decline in 1959, the news from the sports field was not much better. Having been given undemanding qualifying challenges, England’s national team had failed to progress beyond the group stages in two out of the three World Cup competitions of the 1950s, and were eliminated by the injury-depleted reigning champions, Uruguay, at the next hurdle, in the 1954 competition in Switzerland. Although the Munich disaster deprived our 1958 squad of at least

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three key players – Edwards, Taylor and Byrne – too often, perverse selection decisions made by an unqualified FA selection committee deprived our national side of its best players – Matthews, Shackleton and Charlton were cases in point.

Also, despite enjoying status-lifting victories over new world champions, West Germany, and world champions in waiting, Brazil, England were annihilated twice by Hungary and once by Yugoslavia in other friendlies and humiliated by the USA in a 1950 World Cup group game. Britain's 1956 Olympic medal haul was a meagre six golds, with only one coming in track and field, and England's aged Test cricketers were controversially thrashed 4-0 in 1958/59 by the resurgent Aussies under Richie Benaud.

After the 1948/49 peak in football attendances, when an English Football League game attracted an average 22,300 crowd, football had begun to lose popularity. By 1959/60, the average Football League gate had been reduced to 16,000, a fall of 28% over the decade. The English First Division was not immune. Top flight attendances fell by 20% over that period.

Cinemas were experiencing declining custom, too, with TV proving to be a huge counter-attraction. In 1946, there were 1,635 million cinema admissions, but by 1956 these had fallen to 1,101 million and by 1963 this figure had plummeted to just 357 million. By the end of the fifties, an average family watched five hours of TV a day during the winter. With rising prosperity, leisure options were widening, particularly for the working classes. There was also increasing disillusionment with British professional football on account of the failures of its club and national sides against foreign opposition, notwithstanding Wolves' status-enhancing friendly victories over Real Madrid and Honved under the Molineux lights. But neither Wolves nor the 'Busby Babes' had managed to prevail against the superior Spanish sides in the newly established European Cup. Britons were adjusting slowly to the growing realisation that we could no longer kid ourselves we were a world power – politically, economically, militarily or as a leading football nation.

Despite the promptings of the national coach, Walter Winterbottom, and the pioneering stands taken by club managers such as Matt Busby and Stan Cullis, the FA had adopted that same lofty isolationism to European competition as they had to the fledgling World Cup, and were paying for that disdain. On the disastrous South American tour in the summer of 1959, a young, inexperienced England side lost all

three internationals – against Brazil, Peru and Mexico – with the Peru defeat (1-4), the most embarrassing of the lot.

A chastened ex-Claret and England international, Tommy Lawton, commented: ‘We forgot that the Continentals were all the time perfecting the art of the game, advancing the tactics and the moves. We didn’t think that anyone had anything to teach us. We didn’t want to learn that our tactics became out-of-date.’ The irony was that the emergence of two leading continental international sides during the fifties – Hungary and Sweden – owed much to the coaching skills of two Englishmen – Jimmy Hogan from Burnley and George Raynor from Barnsley. Talk about ‘a prophet is not without honour save in his own country’!

Hogan favoured the ‘pass and move’ game which often caught the opposing defenders ball-watching and helped evade their crunching tackles. He championed the techniques which were employed so successfully by Arthur Rowe’s ‘push and run’ Spurs side of the early fifties and practised by both Harry Potts’s Burnley and Bill Nicholson’s Spurs sides of the late fifties and early sixties. Hogan preached the advantage of the short corner to keep possession and to draw tall defenders out of the penalty area. He advocated the short free kick to maintain the momentum of the game while reducing the prospect of possession being immediately lost. He insisted goalkeepers should throw the ball out to a colleague rather than launching it down the centre. He would demonstrate the art of the ‘drag back’ with the sole of the boot, demonstrated with devastating effect by Puskas at Wembley in 1953. Hogan was frustrated by the ‘Victorian ideas’ impeding English football. He commented: ‘Our former intelligent ideas are gradually fading out. We have developed an “up-in-the-air”, “get-the-ball-if-you-can” game. We are continuously kicking the ball down the middle to the marked centre-forward, hoping for a defensive error and not exploiting the wing play as we used to.’

Scottish international, Tommy Docherty, took note. He was also a convert to Walter Winterbottom’s new coaching gospel, placing himself alongside Alan Brown once of Burnley, but then at Sunderland, Ron Greenwood at Arsenal, Bill Nicholson at Spurs, Malcolm Allison at West Ham, Joe Mercer at Aston Villa, Don Revie, then playing at Leeds, and Alf Ramsey of Ipswich. He could see clearly how Hogan’s influence had manifested itself in Hungary’s humiliating 6-3 victory at Wembley. It was small wonder that the Hungarian people dedicated their famous triumph to Hogan. Docherty remarked in a later press

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interview: '(Hungary's) passing movement made us British players feel as if they were from a different planet. They'd lull you into a false sense of security with a procession of quick, short passes that took them nowhere and then suddenly unleash a paralysing long pass that would arrive in space a split second ahead of one of their tuned-in team-mates. They realised the importance of supporting runs. Every time they had possession they had between two and five men ready to receive the ball.'

Just as Hogan helped revitalise post-war Hungarian football, George Raynor achieved similar results in Sweden. Goran Berger, the Swedish national football museum's curator remarked: 'It really seems amazing that England didn't want him when he came home. For us, he's simply the most successful national coach of all time. Incredibly popular, he changed the game here with his tactics and organisation. He taught himself how to coach, never took an exam in his life and yet he taught us how to win.'

Raynor's roll of honour included; 1948, Olympic gold medal, won in England; 1950, third place in the World Cup competition (in which England experienced a humiliating 1-0 defeat by the United States); 1952, Olympic bronze medal, won in Helsinki, beaten only by the great Hungarians; 1958, World Cup Finalists in Sweden, after Pele's brace helped Brazil beat his side 5-2. Then, the following year, on a brief sabbatical from Skegness, where he worked as assistant store man at Butlin's, Raynor provided the tactical blueprint for Sweden's visit to Wembley, masterminding a 3-2 victory in October 1959, which was then only England's second home defeat to foreign opposition.

'I feel like a football fifth columnist,' Raynor told the pressmen the night after Sweden's Wembley victory. 'I got some sort of satisfaction out of the result, but not enough. I would much rather have been doing the same sort of thing for the country of my birth. All I consider is that the people in England have had their chance. I want to work in England – for England. They want me in Ghana, in Israel, in Mexico and in Sweden. I am a knight in Sweden and have a huge gold medal of thanks from King Gustaf. I have a letter of thanks and commendation from the Prime Minister of Iraq. My record as a coach is the best in the world. I don't smoke. I don't drink. I live for football.'

Instructively, it was Raynor's tactical innovation to put a man on Hidegkuti, thus stalling the Hungarian supply line, which had helped Sweden achieve a highly creditable 2-2 draw in their friendly with Hungary in Budapest, just prior to the Magyars' 1953 Wembley triumph. Raynor was also astute enough to know that this would

be an exhausting task and therefore detailed two Swedish players to undertake this task in turn, swapping over during the game to ensure that the marker always remained fresh.

Although Winterbottom watched this game, he did not follow Raynor’s lead. It took both Alf Ramsey and Stanley Matthews to recognise the need to contain Hidegkuti once the Wembley game was underway. In fact, Matthews yelled at captain, Billy Wright, to assign someone to close down Hidegkuti, who was enjoying the freedom of the park. Ramsey was convinced that if the Hungarians had been allowed less room in midfield, the result would have been different, but England’s preparations had not been good enough. Ramsey learned from this humiliation when he came to create a world-beating England side after assuming management of the national side in 1962.

After three World Cup failures and the South American fiasco, former England international, David Jack concluded in a 1959 *Empire News* column: ‘Make no mistake this is crisis time for England. The game we gave to the world is no longer played with the required skill in these islands.’ Jack blamed poor team selection, which was not the sole responsibility of the head coach Winterbottom.

Nottingham Forest’s 1959 FA Cup winning manager, Billy Walker, blamed the lack of craft in the inside-forward and wing-half positions. Even Johnny Haynes, an inside-forward of Wayne Rooney’s stature, was not excused. Walker complained that English coaches were suppressing individual flair.

Walker, a former Aston Villa and England star, was right to point an accusing finger at English coaches. The evidence provided by contemporary players, such as Jackie Charlton, Jimmy Greaves, Noel Cantwell, Gordon Banks, Tommy Docherty and Alan Mullery, suggested that the standard of preparation employed by many leading clubs was ‘shambolic’. With notable exceptions, as at Spurs, West Ham and Burnley, there was little attention applied to developing ball skills or to honing tactical manoeuvres, such as dead-ball routines. Training more often comprised perfunctory long distance running and weight lifting. Some ‘coaches’ held the view that depriving their players of the ball during training made them hungrier for it on match days. While the methods employed at Spurs, West Ham and Burnley were of a much more sophisticated order, there is little doubt that prevailing amateurish approaches held back the development of English football.

The brilliance of Real Madrid’s performance in the European Cup Final of 1960 emphasised the gulf in class between the top foreign

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performers and our own. Real's stunning 7-3 victory at Hampden Park over Eintracht Frankfurt was achieved on the same bumpy surface that was blamed for the turgid 1-1 draw between Scotland and England nine days before. Charles Buchan, editor of *Football Monthly*, blamed England's failure to compete at the highest level upon tactical intransigence. He wrote: 'We will not accept the facts that long wing-to-wing passes and long kicks up field by full-backs are useless. And that players trying to run, or dribble, round opponents are doomed to failure.'

Burnley and Northern Ireland playmaker, Jimmy McIlroy, shared Buchan's frustration. In 1960 Jimmy, having just schemed Burnley to the league title victory said in a press article: 'I wish I could interest every club in the country in FOOTBALL. I mean football, which doesn't include "getting stuck in," "fighting" or "belting the ball." Before Burnley leave their dressing room, the final instructions from manager, Harry Potts, are nearly always the same: "Play football but above all, enjoy your game." What a pity other managers don't think the same way. Critics bewail the lack of ball players. So do I. Yet the blame rests entirely on the people who control the teams. What chance has a boy to concentrate on skill as he avoids crunching tackles and hard robust play? Why aren't defenders taught to win the ball in a tackle, instead of simply learning to stop an opponent? I believe skill and fight are opposites – the complete footballer possesses a blend of both – but the emphasis should be very much on skill. If we are to equal the best in Continental football the tough stuff must be erased from our game, to make way for more subtlety, delicacy and softness of touch. Like sheep, clubs follow the leader. When Wolves and Chelsea won the League the secret of their success was claimed to be hard, fighting soccer, which led to many copying this method. My wish for the coming season, is that Burnley's style of play becomes the fashion, because I'm certain English football will benefit from it.' It did not, although Burnley continued to epitomise the standard McIlroy advocated while Spurs would win the Double in the 1960/61 season playing in a similar style.

Britain's major national sports, football and cricket, remained largely insulated from a world that was leaving Britain behind. Up until 1962, professional cricket still staged an annual representative contest between the 'Gentlemen' and the 'Players'. The administration of the game reflected the 'old school tie' ethos. We would not recover the Ashes until another ten years had passed and then, only after the appointment of a curmudgeonly, professional, tactical leader in Ray

Illingworth. At national and club levels, professional football was little different from cricket. It was still gripped by what Anthony Sampson described as ‘club-amateur’ influences. Despite having a major say, the national coach, Walter Winterbottom, was not even entitled to pick his own England team. International selections were made by an FA committee, made up of the ‘great and the good’ with no experience of managing professional football. Ultimately, we would look to another ultra-professional tactician, Sir Alf Ramsey, to change that practice and restore our international prowess.

Manchester United’s brilliant young team had threatened to turn the tide between 1956 and 1958, but they were snuffed out at Munich, so, it was left to others to pick up the early running. Emerging from the tactical vacuum of the late fifties were two British club sides who would lead the way in developing a more fluid style of play. It was an approach that would have greater prospects of success against continental opponents. Spurs would become the first British club side to secure European silverware, when they lifted the European Cup Winners’ Cup in 1963, but little Burnley would demonstrate on national TV how illustrious European sides could be overturned in their impressive but frustratingly brief European Cup campaign of 1960/61. Both sides’ approach was more modern than their First Division contemporaries. Alan Ridgill of the *Sunday Pictorial* described Burnley thus: ‘Here was the almost perfect soccer machine – as smooth running as a Rolls-Royce and yet packing the punch of a centurion tank.’ At that time, protected by the mandatory wage cap and the feudal ‘retain and transfer’ system, it was then just possible that a talented, tactically astute David, like Burnley, could defeat a series of richer, more fancied Goliaths over the long, rugged haul of an English First Division football season. But even at the time it was acknowledged that, as with Ipswich’s league championship in 1961/62, that theirs was a triumph against the odds.

Thereafter, those odds grew ever longer. Burnley’s team, like the town, required more resources in order to thrive. The imminent abolition of the footballers’ maximum wage not only disturbed the balance sheet, it also meant that the team could no longer rely upon attracting the best young talent. That talent would go increasingly to the highest bidder. As a small town club with limited means, greater efficiencies needed to be found in order to keep at bay the increasing competition from richer teams. There were also other leisure attractions to contend with. The club was forced to consider how it should market itself within the confines of a declining local economy.

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The 'sell to survive' policy was born in this climate. Regrettably that policy could only work whilst the club remained a force in the top flight and was seen to give its talented youngsters a potentially earlier opportunity to shine on the big stage. By so doing, Burnley could still hope to compete with and confound the more lucrative enticements offered by larger clubs. However, it needed its youth policy to deliver at a high rate of productivity to plug the gaps left by its departing stars. Once the harvest began to fail, the team fell away, and, as a result, the law of diminishing returns began to bite deeper and deeper into its prospects.

The legacy of an illustrious past is often to breed expansive and sometimes unrealistic expectations. Some past glories become rods with which to punish present failures rather than remaining as sources of pride and occasions for commemorative celebration. Perhaps selective interpretation of Britain's past has left succeeding generations with a preposterous burden, leading to expectations of glory irrespective of the type, size or quality of competition they face in business or on the sporting field. A number of ex-England managers might have something to say about that. To have ambition and belief is obviously positive. Burnley's 1959/60 achievement set a daunting standard for the Clarets and while new goals need to be stretching, they also need tempering with realism. As with the town's modern economic struggles, all of that is for today. This story is about yesterday: a triumph of small over big. In a world dominated by flawed global conglomerates, let's celebrate that for now.