

KIND OF BLUE 1958–1962

*'Expect nothing. Live frugally on surprise'*  
Alice Walker, 1973

## THE 1958/59 SEASON

### Chelsea v Wolverhampton Wanderers

**'When'**  
**30 August 1958**

Dad warned me that Chelsea would be cannon fodder. They had won the Football League in 1955 adopting a rugged style of play but then fell away quickly. In a cartoon of the time, one character remarks, 'I see Chelsea have won', to which his companion replies: 'They can't have, they won last week.' Inconsistency ran through them like the lettering on seaside rock. Massive victories sat alongside humiliating defeats. When asked what he thought of this Chelsea defence, their prospective coach, Tommy Docherty, replied that 'A jellyfish has more shape.' It is difficult to reconcile the opulent Chelsea Football Club of today with the infuriatingly inconsistent 'Drake's Ducklings'. Alan Hansen had yet to say 'You'll never win anything with kids.'

August 30<sup>th</sup> 1958 was a day of swooning heat. The huge glass roof at Paddington station incubated the warmth from the sun and that from its many copper-domed steam locomotives. Wispy, shimmering vapours conveyed the scent of sulphur, tar and scorched oil. Ruddy-faced men in open-necked shirts and loose flannels heaved strapped, swollen, brown leather suitcases into the crammed chocolate and cream carriages. Meanwhile, intricately curled or pony-tailed women stood aside, coolly issuing instructions. Some wore flared floral skirts with broad black belts while others sported straight shift dresses. Many of these couples

or young families were off to the Cornish Riviera: to St Ives, Newquay or Looe. The summer of '58 was the high-water mark of holiday rail traffic. Thereafter, many more families turned to the road.

London was bulging with tourists. Many chose the parched parks where they could stretch out under the cooler canopies of the flaking plane trees. Despite the baking temperatures we made for Lyons Corner House cafeteria, where we joined the throng jostling with trays in search of elusive seats. It seemed that the protective metal covers provided for our fatty, soggy meals were as superfluous as any hope of taste or nourishment. Eating out in the fifties was generally a functional, joyless duty. The tube that rocked and rolled from Earl's Court to Fulham Broadway was packed, too, compressing the overpowering odour of tobacco. Every breath was worth twenty un-tipped. From then I knew what life must be like for a laboratory beagle.

Outside the ground there were programme sellers, emphasising the second syllable in their hoarse cries for custom – proGRARMS! There were badge sellers, too, selling small, blue star-shaped plastic brooches containing a selection of photographs of favourite players: Jimmy Greaves, Peter Brabrook and Ron Tindall. I chose one of Jimmy Greaves sporting a crew cut. He was smiling mischievously. It was a prophetic pick. Climbing the steep stairwell on to the open western terraces, it was obvious that this was a huge crowd. It was recorded as being over 61,000. I had never seen so many people squeezed into such a restricted space. Feeling the full force of the sun's glare, many found that they were overdressed. Thick Harris tweed sports jackets were removed, ties were unfastened and chests exposed but still the beady sweat trickled down so many flushed faces. Someone tried to make a paper hat out of a newspaper. It was a poor effort attracting much good-natured ridicule. On the public address system they were playing *With a Little Bit of Luck*, a song from the popular musical, *My Fair Lady*, declaimed by Stanley Holloway in a gruff, atonal, cockney voice. Chelsea needed no luck or help on this scintillating afternoon as they murdered Wolves. Jimmy Greaves recalled in his book, *Greavsie*:

*We didn't get off to the best of starts. Bobby Mason put Wolves ahead after only two minutes, but we were far from being fazed by that. There were certain games when I took to the pitch and just knew I was going to have one of those games when everything would go my way. From my first touch of the ball, I felt comfortable. I was relishing the big match occasion, confident of my own ability, sure that I would feature among the goals. In our first real attack of note, I corkscrewed past Ron Flowers and Gerry Harris before playing a one-two with Peter Brabrook. Though shackled by Bill Slater, when receiving the ball back from Peter I felt confident enough to hit it first time. I'd seen a gap just to the left of Malcolm Finlayson and aimed for that. Whenever I was presented with such an opportunity, I never hit the ball with all the power I could muster because I didn't have to. When I saw an opening, I would simply pass the ball through the space knowing no one would reach it. Malcolm Finlayson couldn't and we were level.*

Jimmy Greaves scored five times that day and each goal seemed a carbon copy of the one before. Time and again he latched on to a sharp pass, anticipating its weight and angle expertly. Without hesitation he instantly made perfect contact with the ball, caressing it into his path. He drew Wolves' central defenders towards him only to flash past them with a shimmy and a dab on the accelerator. Each time Wolves' keeper, Finlayson, advanced, but Jimmy was too quick, too sharp for him. With meticulous timing and accuracy Greaves pushed the ball past Finlayson and into the net. No explosive finish was necessary. This was the hallmark of a master craftsman.

After half an hour Chelsea were 4-1 up. The Wolves defenders were not just red-faced on account of the heat. Billy Wright took unmerciful stick. He looked laboured and cruelly exposed, hardly a credible contender for England's most capped player. The young men around us were cooing 'Ooh Beverley' at him. He looked sheepish, as if he could actually hear their banal jibes above the raucous commotion. Wright had recently married Joy Beverley, who was a member of a popular trio of female singers, the Beverley Sisters. There was little fuss. He took a day off from training. She took a few hours off from her rehearsal. Just a few gathered at the Poole registry office. Joy's sister, 'Babs', described it as 'a quiet affair'. No Berkshire castle and host of angelic harpists for Billy and Joy. No tanker of pink champagne, either, and no celebrity magazine to pick up the tab.

Although Bill Slater reduced the deficit with a penalty before half-time, Chelsea seemed well out of sight. At the interval, Wolves' manager, Stan Cullis, yanked the nails out of Billy Wright's palms and instructed Slater to mark Greaves instead. It made little difference. Greaves continued to exploit Wolves' square defence with his lightning reactions. Only a spoilsport linesman denied him a double hat-trick. Cullis might have been the 'Iron Manager' but he was a consummate sportsman, too. He told the *London Evening News* reporter: 'What a player [Greaves is]. Someone's just said he doesn't run around enough. He wouldn't have to do that for me.'

Stan Cullis was a shrewd tactician. He adopted a command and control management style as befitted an old-school army man. Wing Commander Reep's statistical analyses revealed to him that 50 per cent of goals came from no more than one pass and 80 per cent from not more than three passes. Consequently, he wanted his team to make no more than three passes in reaching their opponents' penalty area. So convinced was he by the greater efficacy of the long ball that it was this aspect of the Hungarians' play which impressed him most, while watching their mauling of England at Wembley in 1953. Cullis favoured a pressing game, principally in his opponents' half. He expected his muscular wing-halves, Clamp and Flowers, to move up close behind his

five forwards in a Panzer-like assault which was designed to overwhelm and demoralise the opposition.

Cullis was prepared to accommodate a flair player like Peter Broadbent providing he operated within his tight tactical plan. Cullis demanded that his fast, raiding wingers were supplied with long balls to catch defences at their thinnest. He frowned at a short forward pass. He was cross at a short lateral pass and apoplectic at a back pass, unless made in an emergency. Elaborate passing movements had no part in his plan. His full-backs were told to tackle hard and then find a forward quickly and accurately. His wingers were told to 'hit the corners' but to make for goal if the opportunity arose. He insisted that his players always supported the man in possession. His players were physically and mentally tough and extremely fit. Cullis maintained that his tactics were always fair and constructive but not all pressmen agreed. Ken Jones of the *Daily Mirror* described one Wolves performance, one year later, as 'crash-bang soccer with hardly one breath of imagination or intelligence to break the monotony of crash tackles and aimless passes'.

By contrast, Jimmy Greaves recalled that his 'lovely old manager', Ted Drake, rarely gave his team any instruction about how they should play. Chelsea did not have a coach to fill this gap. The arrival of Tommy Docherty three years later would address this deficit, but would also create territorial tension between him, as coach, and Ted Drake, as manager. As happened at Arsenal, when a Young Turk, Ron Greenwood as coach, clashed with an older Turk, George Swindin as manager, the result was a turkey on the pitch.

Jimmy described Ted Drake as an 'all the best' manager because, according to him, that was the sum of Ted's pre-match advice. It was small wonder that Chelsea were exasperatingly inconsistent as they played much more by instinct than design. According to Jimmy Greaves' jocular accounts, Chelsea seemed like a pub team that happened to be in the First Division.

However, Jimmy recognised in his book, *The Heart of the Game*, that: 'The majority of managers in the late fifties were figureheads. Perhaps it was because managers ran a club in every sense of the

word that they didn't have time to supervise training or turn their minds to tactical ploys. Many managers doubled up as the club secretary, a throwback to the pre-war years ... Their duties could also involve match-day catering.' Many managers at leading clubs were then largely desk-bound. Few had the public profile or status which managers command today. Although Ted Drake distinguished himself as a tracksuit manager when he joined Chelsea in 1952, this was because he took the unusual step of leading the players' training sessions. However, as a coach and tactician, he was less well equipped than those that followed him: Tommy Docherty and Dave Sexton.

I was exulted by what I saw. The drama of the freeze frame had been trumped by the exhilaration of the moving picture. I came to understand that this was a game with sudden changes of pace, rapid speed of thought and explosive acceleration. If I was less startled by the natural talent and honed technique on show this was because Jimmy Greaves made it look so simple.

As a postscript to this stunning victory, four days later Chelsea played at Spurs and lost 4-0. Any designs I might have had about becoming a glory hunter were knocked back into lugubrious shape. Anything else would have been an offence to karma.

## Norwich City v Tottenham Hotspur (FA Cup fifth round)

**'I Got Stung / One Night'**  
**18 February 1959**

The fifties proved to be a golden age for the underdog, particularly in the FA Cup. For example, Third Division (North) side Port Vale reached the semi-finals in 1954 having beaten both of their First Division opponents, Cardiff City and FA Cup holders, Blackpool. Frequently, the poor state of pitches during the winter months helped the underdog, enabling them to compete on more even terms. The 1959 FA Cup winners, Nottingham Forest, came

perilously close to defeat in the third round on an iced, rutted surface at Tooting & Mitcham while Liverpool, then a Second Division side, lost their balance on Worcester City's ice rink. And, of course, the maximum wage cap and the feudal 'retain and transfer' system enabled smaller clubs to retain their most talented players for longer periods. After Third Division side Southampton had thrashed top-flight team Manchester City 5-1 at Maine Road in 1960, they kept their two wingers, who created so much mayhem – the tricky Terry Paine and tearaway John Sydenham. Both eventually played for their parent club in the top tier.

Norwich City's cup run in '58/59 started inauspiciously. They were languishing in 16<sup>th</sup> place in the newly-formed Third Division. Their manager, Archie Macaulay, a distinguished former Arsenal and Scottish international right-half, had come under intense pressure from the fans. Early in the season he became barricaded in his office as disillusioned supporters protested loudly in the street outside. In keeping with the dismal mood, City struggled to beat amateurs Ilford, a lowly-placed Isthmian League side, at home in the first round. The Canaries were actually a goal behind at half-time and only secured victory late in the game.

In the second round, Norwich first drew at Swindon and were then under the cosh in the replay. However, after home keeper Ken Nethercott had to retire hurt, the previously disgruntled Norwich crowd got behind their depleted side. Suddenly, the ground began to pulse and pound with vociferous passion. As Swindon melted in the heat they generated, the dapper, crew-cut Canadian Errol Crossan netted the goal which put City through to face Manchester United at home in the third round.

The occasion was a triumph for the terse, poker-faced Archie Macaulay. Despite taking merciless flak from the fans, he kept his nerve. Macaulay knew his team could play. He just needed to convince his players. His shrewd positional changes helped. Ron Ashman, with over 400 senior games behind him, was converted into a solid, thoughtful left-back, where he found a steady partner in Brian Thurlow. To accommodate Ashman's move, Roy McCrohan was switched to right-half, where he operated in a defensive capacity. Macaulay also restored the twinkling Bobby Brennan

to the left wing, when most supporters thought he was finished. Meanwhile on the opposite flank, Errol Crossan, nicknamed 'Cowboy' because of his Canadian roots, was encouraged to run with paralysing directness at opposing defences. The little Irishman, Jimmy Hill, was given greater licence to exercise his craft in midfield. In turn, Terry Allcock was instructed to push up more to partner the predatory Terry Bly. The tactical changes worked like a dream. Confidence began to surge through the once choking Canaries.

Matt Busby took no chances. He fielded his strongest side including his expensive new recruit Albert 'Golden Boy' Quixall. Bobby Charlton, Dennis Viollet, Bill Foulkes, Warren Bradley and Irish international keeper, Harry Gregg, all played. Although Munich must have still been fresh in their minds, United's league form had recovered remarkably. They would finish the season as First Division runners-up to Wolves.

Norwich's skipper, Ron Ashman, won the toss and compelled United to face the low, dazzling winter sun. The afternoon was so numbingly cold that 35 fans needed the assistance of the St John's Ambulance brigade. As for the players, they had their work cut out in just keeping their feet. A thin, crusty carpet of snow covered a rock-like Carrow Road surface. But the treacherous conditions did not wholly account for the ruthless way in which Norwich swept their famous opponents aside.

Macaulay instructed his team to hustle United from the start and to sit tightly on their inside trio of forwards: Charlton, Viollet and Quixall. Nevertheless, United made the better start. Fortunately, Charlton slipped when through on goal and Thurlow managed to clear another effort off the line. But, thereafter, Norwich seized total control. United's wing-halves, Freddie Goodwin and Wilf McGuinness, became bewildered by the skill and thrust of Hill and Allcock while the full-backs, Carolan and Foulkes, were undone by Brennan's sparkling footwork and Crossan's speed. The quality of Norwich's football was unbelievable. Only an outstanding display of goalkeeping from United's Harry Gregg kept the final score down to 0-3.

The star of the occasion was local-born centre-forward Terry

Bly, who on this shivering afternoon simply roasted United's centre-half, Ronnie Cope. Macaulay commented, 'Using his speed and balance, Bly had all the room he needed in the middle and could have had half a dozen goals.' Bly settled for two. The first came after 31 minutes. Terry Allcock's penetrative pass gave Bobby Brennan the opportunity to run to the byline whereupon he sent a skidding centre into United's box. Bly's sprint proved far too quick for the slipping and sliding Manchester defenders. Without hesitating, Bly blasted the ball past Gregg. Although a retaliatory attack resulted in Viollet heading wide, Norwich were deservedly in front at the break. Norwich goalie Ken Nethercott had only one save to make before half-time, when he dealt competently with Scanlon's curling shot.

Norwich were uncontainable at the start of the second half. Bly's header hit the crossbar, releasing a shower of snow. Bobby Brennan's shot hit the post and Terry Allcock's effort was blocked on the line. Gregg had to hurl himself this way and that to keep the rampant Canaries at bay. It couldn't last. And it didn't. On the hour, Bly beat Foulkes and raced down the left wing. Making an unaccustomed error, Gregg could only parry Bly's high cross, allowing Crossan to head into the empty net. Norwich continued to pour forward. Gregg saved brilliantly from Bly. Allcock's shot fizzed past the post and Crossan's effort was disallowed. But with only two minutes remaining, Norwich added to United's humiliation. Having beaten the hapless Cope once again, Bly was left with a clear run on goal. He cut in from the left and sent a searing right-foot drive past Gregg at his near post.

Bly remembered: 'I only had a few touches of the ball during the game but after each touch it seemed to end up in the net.' The headlines of the local *Pink'n* read 'Bly, Bly Babes. It was glory, glory all the way.' Bly had nearly given up the game during the previous season because of a serious cartilage injury. During the fifties, treatment of sports injuries was primitive. Players rarely recovered from medial or cruciate knee injuries and even cartilage problems could ruin their careers.

Ron Ashman confessed, 'It's difficult to work out just what happened to us. One minute we were a struggling Third Division

team lucky to be in the third round. Then, overnight, we had this conviction we could beat anyone. You see, it wasn't just that we had taken United to the cleaners. There were good players in our team, a lot of good players. We weren't a kick and rush side and it just needed something to set it off. Beating United did that for us. Home advantage is a tremendous thing in the FA Cup, but as time went on we honestly believed we could win anywhere against anyone.'

Macaulay commented: 'They all laughed when I said we could beat Manchester United but I knew our men to be capable of winning. I planned two lines of defence. Right-half, Roy McCrohan stayed back with the centre-half, Butler, and the full-backs, while left-half Matt Crowe operated in front. As soon as a Norwich move broke down, Terry Allcock doubled back with Crowe. That way we were able to break up most of their moves before they started. I reckoned full-back Billy Foulkes could be beaten so I told our inside-left, Jimmy Hill, to stay on the wing with Bobby Brennan and that was where our goals came from. It worked to perfection.'

Norwich's next opponents were Cardiff City, who were preparing for a top-flight return. Once again, Bly was the two-goal hero, chipping the Cardiff keeper for his second-half winner. In a battle of the birds, yellow prevailed over blue (3-2), setting up a trip to that old boiler of a cockerel, Spurs.

Spurs' boss, Bill Nicholson, was a hard taskmaster. He expected the highest standards from his players on and off the pitch. He was a shrewd tactician, too, one of the sharpest around. Nicholson's head wasn't turned by a 10-4 victory in his first game in charge. He recalled that 'too many silly goals were given away'. Spurs leaked 95 league goals during the '58/59 season – relegation form. Creative genius Danny Blanchflower was partly to blame. Too often, he neglected his defensive duties. But Blanchflower's cavalier performances were not Nicholson's only problem. His whole team was misfiring. Cliff Jones, signed for a record fee from Swansea, looked more like an apprentice than the world-class winger he was to become. As talented as he was, Johnny Brooks performed fitfully at inside-forward; 'always better in a winning

side', was Nicholson's terse view. Nicholson needed a dynamic ball-winner. Hearts' Dave Mackay fitted that bill, but he did not arrive until March.

A consistent goalscorer was needed to play alongside Smith, but the Spurs boss had to make do with Dave Dunmore, temporarily. Chelsea's Les Allen was a better option. He would not arrive until later in the year as a result of a shrewd swap involving Brooks. Ultimately, Jimmy Greaves would deliver a better solution. In 1961, Nicholson paid AC Milan £99,999 for him. The goalkeeping position was vulnerable, too. Nicholson did not rate either John Hollowbread or Ron Reynolds. Only Dundee's keeper, Bill Brown, would satisfy his need.

Archie Macaulay knew Spurs' defensive organisation was shaky and their morale, fragile. He believed his team had a chance, particularly with 20,000 Norwich fans accompanying them to a grey, murky White Hart Lane, doubling the number that had grumpily attended City's home games a few months before. Norwich was in the grip of cup fever. Tickets were at a premium. Work schedules went haywire. Almost everyone knew the mournful, yet oddly inspiring, Carrow Road anthem, 'On the Ball City'. The club were on the local paper's front pages for weeks.

Macaulay knew he had to stop Spurs from playing. Norwich's pressing game wasn't pretty. Their tackling was tough, ultra tough. Everyone defended, from the front to the back. But chances still came. Thankfully, Ken Nethercott was in excellent form, making three smart saves before the interval. Ron Ashman recalled, 'We had to keep things tight because Spurs had some outstanding individual players. They had to be pinned down and in a cup-tie atmosphere you are bound to get rugged stuff. We needed a goal to settle us down.'

The Norwich players were buoyant at half-time. They had done half their job well. Their hosts had not hurt them and seemed dispirited. Shortly after the break, Norwich showed they could sting as well as tame. After 65 minutes, Terry Allcock drove them deservedly into the lead. Just as Macaulay hoped, Spurs began to fragment. Drooping postures and resigned looks abounded. Jones' murderous pace deserted him. Like his colleagues, he ran

into blind alleys, wandering ineffectively along the left wing where he was barracked by the impatient home supporters. With Spurs unravelling, Hill, Allcock and Bly had good chances to make the tie safe but they spurned them. Time was almost up when Dunmore chased a loose ball on the left flank. He centred immediately. Hearing Cliff Jones' call to 'leave it', Bobby Smith dummied the cross, allowing the out-of-sorts Welsh winger to volley home the equaliser. Ashman was aghast, saying: 'It was the one defensive error we made. We never expected Dunmore to retrieve the ball after Jim Iley sliced a shot towards the touchline. But he did. I managed to get a hand to the shot but couldn't stop it.'

For the replay, Danny Blanchflower was restored at inside-right in place of Harmer. Welsh international right-winger, Terry Medwin, came in for Brooks and Eddie Clayton took over from Dunmore. Norwich were unchanged. Carrow Road was like a cauldron with 38,000 people crammed in. Blanchflower remarked, 'I have played all round the world in some of the world's greatest stadiums, but I have never experienced an atmosphere like that. The crowd is worth a goal start for Norwich. The anthems, the cheers are always in your ears. There is no way you can shut them out.' There was no way of shutting out the Norwich players, either.

Spurs almost went ahead through Bobby Smith but Nethercott saved his shot superbly. 'At my age one good save a match is enough,' cracked the veteran custodian. He wasn't troubled again. Roared on by a febrile crowd, Norwich swarmed all over Spurs. The crucial breakthrough came in the 63<sup>rd</sup> minute. Ashman chipped into the box; he later conceded it was a miskick. The Spurs defenders were slow to react to a deflection. Bly unhesitatingly drove the loose ball past Hollowbread. The misty night sky was rent with a thunderous roar.

At the final whistle the delirious crowd poured on to the pitch. Still Ashman found enough space to dance an excited jig with a policeman, whose sense of duty took second place to his all-consuming excitement. Lugubrious but sporting, Bill Nicholson said, 'Norwich are a good side and they kept coming at us all the time. Good luck to them in the next round.' Norwich were drawn

away at Sheffield United, who were managed by Joe Mercer, Macaulay's former Arsenal colleague.

The wily Mercer had successfully introduced *catenaccio* to Bramall Lane – a back four with a 'sweeper' operating behind to seal any gaps and take care of other opponents breaking from deep positions. The blunting Blades, with the immaculate Joe Shaw operating as their sweeper, conceded just seven goals in 17 league games. But eagle-eyed Archie Macaulay noticed that their right-back, Cec Coldwell, did not cover the centre-half as well as England full-back Graham Shaw did on the left. He decided that Norwich should probe United's left flank in order to draw Joe Shaw over to that side and attempt to exploit the space left by Coldwell, on the Blades' right, by pinging a long pass into the inside-left channel for Bly or Hill to latch on to. The move had to be played at pace and the pass executed with great accuracy. It needed to be delivered far enough out to keep Sheffield goalie, Hodgkinson, at home, but not so far out that United's wing-halves could snuff out the danger.

However, on a bright Sheffield afternoon, City's hopes seemed eclipsed when Ken Nethercott dislocated his right shoulder after diving at the feet of United's left-winger. At that point Norwich were already a goal down as Russell's deflected shot looped over the unlucky Nethercott. Macaulay insisted that Nethercott should come off and Brennan, a winger, should go in goal. But the captain, Ashman, overruled his manager, telling his keeper: 'If you go off we have no chance of equalising. You go back in goal, Ken, and we'll keep Sheffield out of your reach.' Ashman was as good as his word, and late in the game Brennan's mazy dribble set up the unmarked Crossan for an easy equaliser. Nethercott bravely stood at his post for over an hour, enduring excruciating pain. He would never play for Norwich again. Sandy Kennon replaced him in the replay. Having jumped jail, Norwich surged into a 2-0 lead in the replay. Brennan turned his marker, Coldwell, before thumping a drive into the top right-hand corner. Then Bly seized upon a defence-splitting pass and dinked a delicate shot over the advancing Hodgkinson. Although the Blades' arch-poacher, 'Doc' Pace, punished Kennon when he fumbled Hamilton's low shot,

Bly restored City's two-goal lead after the break, blasting home from close range. Sheffield's Gerry Summers headed in from a late corner to produce a tense finish but Norwich held out.

In the semi-final at White Hart Lane Norwich were paired with Luton, then a declining First Division side. Despite dominating the early play the Canaries missed several gilt-edged chances. Allan Brown made them pay by heading the Hatters into a first-half lead from Billy Bingham's precise cross. Although Brennan equalised after the break, capitalising upon a miscued header to score with a scorching drive, Norwich could not make their superiority count. In fact, Norwich were indebted to their shaky keeper, Kennon, as it was his acrobatic save which denied Luton a late winner.

In the replay at St Andrew's, Norwich again had the better of the early play but found ex-England goalie Ron Baynham in international form. On the one occasion when the City forwards managed to beat him, Brendan McNally cleared off the line. Norwich were then left to rue their fortune as Northern Ireland's World Cup hero, Billy Bingham, stabbed home a second-half winner. At Wembley, Luton played poorly in losing to ten-man Nottingham Forest. The Norwich players felt they would have made a better fist of the occasion but settled for their new celebrity status.

## Yet more World Cup disappointment

In the immediate post-war years, English football seemed to suffer from a 'Little Englander' mentality. We were slow to join the World Cup competition. We seemed complacent, feeling we had nothing to prove after beating world champions, Italy, 4-0 in Turin in 1948. What then followed in Brazil, two years later, was a very nasty surprise. Our World Cup defeat by the fledgling USA side emphasised our sagging status. Having insulated ourselves from modern tactical thinking, we were ruthlessly torn apart by the Hungarians in 1953, and again in 1954, just prior to the World Cup finals in Switzerland. Despite prestigious victories in friendly

internationals against recently-crowned world champions West Germany in the autumn of 1954, and against Brazil, the world champions-in-waiting in 1956, when it came to the 'real thing', a World Cup tournament, we faltered serially.

We were slow to join the European Cup competition, too. The 1955 Football League champions, Chelsea, were discouraged from joining by our football authorities. Thanks to Matt Busby's determination, Manchester United joined the competition during the 1956/57 season, but they were eliminated by the mighty Real Madrid. Of course, we will never know what Manchester United might have achieved had their side not been tragically decimated at Munich. However, succeeding champions, Wolves, stumbled immediately. Stan Cullis, their manager, boasted of his team's international prowess having defeated the cream of European club sides – Honved, Spartak Moscow and Real Madrid – in friendlies. But once tested in an official competition, they came up well short of the required standard.

So did England in the 1958 World Cup finals in Sweden although they were depleted by the Munich tragedy and an injury to Tom Finney, arguably their best outfield player. They were eliminated at the group stage after a play-off defeat by the USSR. After winning the Jules Rimet Trophy, Brazilian skipper, Hideraldo Luiz Bellini, paid England the equivocal compliment: 'England gave us the hardest match. They were better than [finalists] Sweden, very good in defence, and played practical football.'

If this was praise with a faint insult it was probably fair. Helped by Bill Nicholson's shrewd defensive tactics, England managed to blunt Brazilian brilliance in Gothenburg, achieving a creditable 0-0 draw. It was Brazil's only game in Sweden that they failed to win. Like England, Scotland fell at the first hurdle. It was left to our underdogs, Northern Ireland and Wales, to surpass expectations.

Prompted by the midfield brilliance of Danny Blanchflower and Jimmy McIlroy and the penetrative wing play of Peter McParland and Billy Bingham, Northern Ireland beat Czechoslovakia in a group play-off. But their brave fight ended in the last eight.

The Irish were already missing key players through injury. Their absurdly punishing itinerary did the rest. Having held France in the first half, spurning an excellent scoring opportunity, they eventually ran out of puff and were overrun.

Wales qualified for the quarter-finals after heroically defeating Hungary 2-1. There, they faced Brazil. Unfortunately, injury robbed them of the talismanic John Charles but thanks to Jack Kelsey's agility in goal, their plucky defence was breached just once, by Pele, with less than twenty minutes remaining.

### ‘Never had it so good’?

This was neither a vintage time for British football nor one for the country at large. Despite Harold Macmillan's confidence, our consumer boom of the late fifties was not founded upon a strong, sustainable economy. Our textile industry was already in decline because of the strength of foreign competition. Shipbuilding would suffer a similar fate as would other heavy industries. The jobless total rose by almost 500,000 in 1958; it was the highest annual rise in ten years.

In 1938, Neville Chamberlain feared that if Britain entered a European war it could not afford it would cease to be a world power. He was right. Britain fared worse, economically, from victory than West Germany, Italy and Japan ultimately did from defeat. Despite taking our place as a world player in the 1950 Korean conflict, the scale of our decline was emphasised just six years later at Suez. Here, the Americans made us back off, threatening to withdraw essential international monetary aid. The ill-conceived campaign ended less like the snarl of a bulldog and more like the yap of a poodle. Before Suez, we produced a series of self-reverential war films which celebrated British courage with either stiff-upper-lipped or jaunty conviction. After Suez, we were more circumspect. The 1959 British film *Yesterday's Enemy* even suggested that we were not always honourable in combat. We clung doggedly to our world policing role, though, as if we were still an imperial power.

Although we embarked upon decolonisation and retagged

Empire Day as Commonwealth Day, immigration from Commonwealth countries created tensions in our poorer areas where the competition for housing and jobs was more acute. This, plus sexual jealousy, was the background to the 1958 riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill.

In the late fifties, our selective interpretation of past glory clouded our vision of the future. The European Economic Community was inaugurated in 1958 without us. We appeared unconcerned, remaining suspicious of European economic and political ties. At the base of this suspicion was a fear of being taken over. It was this fear which prompted former Labour Prime Minister, Clem Attlee, to sneer: '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 like Ted Heath and George Brown were in a minority when it came to recognising the benefits of stronger ties with Europe. This remains a vexed political issue, notably among Conservatives.

However, we were generally much more upbeat about the American cultural invasion although we sent Jerry Lee Lewis packing in 1958 on account of his marriage to his 13-year-old cousin. We fawned over US popular music, films and TV shows like *I Love Lucy*, *Wagon Train* and *Bilko*. American film star Tony Curtis epitomised the popular 'Italian Look'. The hula hoop craze of 1958 was an American innovation, too. With imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, we had our Elvis facsimile in Cliff Richard while Adam Faith plagiarised 'hiccupping' Buddy Holly. Television adverts, heavily influenced by stateside 'Mad Men', provided jingles which dislodged our youngsters' love of traditional nursery rhymes. Even the highly patriotic *Eagle* comic drew upon glossy American production values. In short, American culture seemed 'cool', whereas British traditions seemed staid, fusty or 'square'.