

RICHARD SYDENHAM
& JOHN WRAGG

The book cover features a collage of football-related images. At the top left is a large, faded portrait of a man in a white Under Armour jersey. Below it is a smaller portrait of a man in a dark jacket. To the right, a man in a black suit is shown in a dynamic pose, as if running or jumping. Further right is a footballer in a red Liverpool kit with the number 9, seen from behind. At the bottom left is a footballer in a blue kit with 'Goat' on the front. At the bottom right is a large, detailed portrait of a man with a beard wearing a Liverpool FC cap. The title 'BIG DEAL! 100 MANAGERS' is prominently displayed in the center, with 'BIG' in red and 'DEAL! 100 MANAGERS' in blue.

BIG

DEAL!

100

MANAGERS

**THEIR GREATEST SIGNING
AND THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY!**

**FOREWORD BY
HARRY REDKNAPP**

**RICHARD SYDENHAM
& JOHN WRAGG**

BIG DEAL!

100 MANAGERS

***THEIR GREATEST SIGNING
AND THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY!***



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Nothing More Exciting in Football than the Swoop

Introduction by Richard Sydenham

‘VILLA SWOOP for star striker’ or whoever was the in-demand player of the day. Those type of headlines on the back page of the *Birmingham Evening Mail* would be enough to excite me as a youngster for many a day.

Not that my beloved Villa made too many blockbuster signings, but any newcomer was exciting and energising to a young supporter. I well recall the day in March 1986 when we signed two former players, Steve Hunt and Andy Blair. We were fighting against relegation and severely lacking in the midfield area with Steve Hodge and Paul Birch woefully under-supported in that part of the field after Steve McMahon and Dennis Mortimer had left.

Neither Hunt nor Blair were household names, but both made a crucial difference to stave off the drop, albeit for a season anyway. I would have certainly nagged my dad to take me to see their home debuts at Villa Park. Why? Because transfers create a buzz at a football club, and not much has changed in that regard.

In those days it felt like newspaper rumours had enough truth to them to believe. That might be because journalists were able to form closer working relationships with managers then, if not full-on friendships, so managers would look after their trusted journo mates with the latest transfer scoop. Now, in a world of press officers and stage-managed media activity that has created distance between clubs and the media, the transfer stories feel more like an educated stab in the dark. Therefore, we get the clickbait website headlines and loose gossip in the media that is less likely to mean a transfer story will actually happen.

Those frequent speculation headlines are so prevalent because editors know these kinds of stories grab fans' attention and subsequently sell newspapers, or generate click-throughs in the modern age we're now in.

When I wrote my previous football book, *Ticket to the Moon, Aston Villa: The Rise and Fall of a European Champion*, I was able to obtain boardroom minutes. In doing so I gleaned amazing inside knowledge of what the football club were discussing and there was nothing more interesting than the conversations surrounding their transfer targets and players of their own who they were planning to sell. Transfers are always big news and, ultimately, they change teams and the course of history – sometimes for the better, sometimes not.

Why did I choose to create this book? This following sentence taken from a recent headmaster's newsletter at my son's school, prior to Remembrance Sunday, kind of explains it: 'We are now at that time of the year when it is customary to remember the fallen of all wars, to reflect on our own families' stories, and to tell and retell those stories that belong to the communities in which we live.' So, while my motivation wasn't about victims of war, it was about telling and the subsequent retelling of how some of the most iconic transfers came about in football history. If we don't find these things out, too many great, untold stories eventually die, untold.

My first interviewee for the book was Alan Durban, in the lounge of a tennis club near Wolverhampton. Many more were on the phone. My chat with Lawrie McMenemy was at the Potter's Heron in Romsey over a four-hour lunch and what a fascinating man he was, which you will understand for yourself when reading his memories – just a natural storyteller.

I wanted to produce this book as a mark of respect to the role of the football manager through the years and the impact of how transfers set the level of a club's ambitions. Look how quickly Blackburn Rovers transformed their aspirations through the wealth of Sir Jack Walker. They followed 26 years outside of the top flight with league finishes of fourth, second and eventually the championship in the next three years. The powerhouse signings of players like Alan Shearer, Chris Sutton and David Batty allowed them to win a Premier League.

Leicester City's shocking Premier League title win in 2015/16 may not have been the result of the kind of investment of some of their wealthier rivals, but the fact they were still able to win the league was a nod to

shrewd transfer business. The capturing of players like Jamie Vardy, Riyad Mahrez, N'Golo Kanté and Robert Huth showed how there will always be a place for clever scouting and that club greats do not always have to arrive via record sums of money.

The contents of this book demonstrate how some of the most celebrated managers down the years view their best signing or signings as a player who they secured for next to nothing, measuring their eventual success against scant investment. Keith Burkinshaw's choice is such an example. Other managers will have listed a player they had to spend serious money on due to their market value but who still proved to be a great servant to the club. Ron Atkinson's selection would typify the latter example.

I also felt it was important to include managers in the book who have been loyal or successful at those clubs who do not always command the headlines. The former England and Derby County legendary defender Roy McFarland, for example, mostly spent his managerial career in the lower leagues as did several others in the book. Hopefully supporters of some of these clubs – and others – will enjoy hearing the stories behind the transfers at their club.