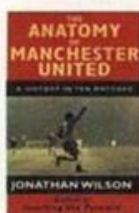


## BOOKS

### United in history



**The Anatomy Of Manchester United**  
A history in ten matches  
by Jonathan Wilson  
W&N, £18.99

As might be expected from someone who has previously written a masterly, acclaimed history of football tactics, Jonathan Wilson's latest book is far more than an analysis of ten matches from Manchester United's history. Those games – bookended by United's first ever FA Cup victory in 1909 and their 12th in 2016 which failed to keep Louis van Gaal in his job, serve as the pegs on which a fluent and entertaining history of the club are hung.

Wilson's thoughtful introduction includes a fascinating discussion about both the "fallibility of memory" and the role and limitations of match reports when reconstructing what took place. Early match reports can be sparse on detail and anyone who has spent hours squinting at a microfilm reader knows full well how there tends to be an exhaustive description of the first half, while the denouement is tucked away inside the paper in two truncated paragraphs.

The choice of featured games is at times not always the obvious and is all the better for it. Even for a United fan, disaster is more gripping than glory, as in the all too brief excoriation of Frank O'Farrell's malcontented team losing 5-0 to Crystal Palace in December 1972. The 3-3 draw against Oldham in the 1990 FA Cup semi-final makes the cut rather than the same scoreline final against Palace; Roy Keane's finest 90 minutes against Juventus in the Stadio delle Alpi rather than April 1999's final. Victory over Chelsea in Moscow in the 2008 Champions League final is there, rather than being outclassed twice by Barcelona, but that may have been stretching a point.

The best match analysis is not one of the ten, but the introduction's revisiting of a battling fightback by the author's own team Sunderland against United, first watched on *Match of the Day* in November 1984 on TV at Wilson's gran's near Roker Park. Not only had he forgotten manager Ron Atkinson's "Gestapo-style black leather overcoat", but also how utterly dire United's defending was, remembering it instead as a display of consummate attacking by Sunderland.

Weaving together the match analyses with the wider history is not without its problems. The book plunges straight into the 1909 game, which does not engage the reader as it should because, unless they know a great deal about United's early days, the references to "Rocca's brigade", Duckworth, Bell and Roberts are names rather than characters. The chapter does later put flesh on the bones, but it would have been better the other way round. The exhaustive kick-by-kick account of the 1968 European Cup final is broken up by chunks of history, which is sometimes difficult to follow.

The history itself, while exceptionally well written and often acutely observed, adds little new. Wilson puts forward the contentious premise in the introduction that from the completion of Old Trafford in 1910 United have had a significant financial advantage which should have resulted in sustained success, rather than their status as English football's most successful club being based around three specific periods under three separate managers. Several pages could be devoted to a rebuttal, but Wilson himself frequently points out that without a wealthy benefactor or an indulgent city council that stadium needs to be paid for, as well as many other factors which might explain why United's history has not always been one of non-stop glory beyond the obvious periods of mismanagement. All in all, a more than worthy attempt at covering a mammoth subject, with an interesting twist.

Joyce Woolridge



### Thought bubble



**What We Think About Football**  
by Simon Critchley  
Profile Books, £8.99

The more thoughtful football fans might rush optimistically to read this book, eager to have their compulsion explained. Why do we invest so much time and money following, thinking and talking about what is only a game? Surely philosophy professor and Liverpool fan Simon Critchley is just the man to enlighten us.

Alas, this pocket-sized, neatly designed book will disappoint such readers. Its attractive look and array of excellent photographs give an appealing veneer to what is essentially a philosophy textbook that will leave those unfamiliar with the subject nursing a sore brain.

Words such as "parrhesia" and "mimesis" rear their impenetrable heads too often. And phrases such as "the adumbration of an inaccessible interiority, a reality that resists commodification" – referring to the 2006 film *Zidane* – will have readers reaching for the paracetamol. Another irritation is that captions for the photographs are at the back of the book rather than alongside the pictures, requiring a regular scramble through the pages.

Critchley's aim is to take a "phenomenological" approach to the game and "outline a poetics of football experience". By this he means reflecting deeply on the experience of watching the sport and finding words to describe the theatre, time, space and beauty that players and supporters combine to create.

In this he succeeds, and does lighten the load of his intellectual arguments with illustrations and examples from football's past and present, relying heavily here on his beloved Liverpool. He considers the essentially social, collaborative nature of a team game watched by spectators, its tribalism and its capacity to make people lose themselves in its drama. He writes well about the effect of crowds and the importance of a club's shared history, as well as providing more down-to-earth criticisms of the modern game's greed and corruption.

Some opinions are questionable. He states that complex tactical plans "quickly become meaningless" once a game starts. Those who have watched José Mourinho's teams repeatedly "park the bus" to gain a narrow win or draw in difficult away fixtures might beg to differ. And, referring to Zinedine Zidane's dismissal at the end of the 2006 World Cup final, he writes: "Heroism always leads to self-destruction and ruination." Yet for every Diego Maradona and George Best, there is also a Pelé and a Bobby Charlton.

**Client:** Profile Books Yellow News  
**Source:** When Saturday Comes  
**Date:** 01/01/2018  
**Page:** 40  
**Reach:** 15716  
**Value:** 4085.76

The best and most readable chapter is the last, where he drops the academic style to summarise the many ills of the modern game on the one hand, but on the other lauds the magical power of great goals and winning performances that transport fans to what he calls "sensate ecstasy".

It says much about the book, however, that my one abiding memory of it is Critchley's anecdote about him and his nephew being utterly convinced they saw the ghost of the author's father, another Liverpool fanatic, while queuing for a cuppa at Goodison Park before a Merseyside derby.

Charles Morris

## Booker prize



**Ooh-Aah**  
The Bob Booker story  
by Greville Waterman  
Bennion Kearny, £12.99

This account of Bob Booker's 33 years in the game at Brentford, Sheffield United and Brighton is a lovingly crafted story of a career which, although it only ended at the start of this decade, bears little resemblance to the life of today's footballer. Greville Waterman is a staunch Brentford supporter but it is to his credit that Booker's time at the Blades and Seagulls is as meticulously researched and chronicled as much as his time at Griffin Park.

Booker was a journeyman whose determination to succeed and natural athleticism overcame a lack of natural talent and which, after a less than stellar start at Brentford, eventually propelled him to the old First Division under Dave Bassett at Sheffield United and turned him into a cult hero at both clubs.

Starting as a parks footballer in Hertfordshire, having completed his apprenticeship as an upholsterer, in 1978 he exchanged a £200-a-week wage for £60 a week and a £250 signing-on fee at Brentford. An unlikely early hat-trick in a 7-2 win against Hull raised expectations but he soon became the target of abuse from the crowd, many of whom would have been earning far more than him. But he eventually won them over by his wholehearted endeavour and willingness to play in any position. A similar transformation took place at Sheffield United whose style under Bassett in their rise from Division Three to the old Division One was ideally suited to him. Throughout the story Booker can't quite really believe that all this is happening to him.

Booker crosses paths with various heroes and villains from that era including Vinnie Jones, Barry Fry, Terry Hurlock and Steve



Coppel. Plus Bradley Walsh. After the two met in local football in Hertfordshire, Booker recommended Walsh to Bees manager Bill Dodgin who would take him on away trips to entertain the players on the coach. He eventually left Brentford without making a senior appearance, realising he would be more successful as an entertainer. Meanwhile, those who witnessed Brentford's 3-0 defeat to Wigan in the 1985 Wembley Football League Trophy final will not be surprised to learn that preparation took place in the bars and clubs of Corfu on a premature "post-season" holiday. There is also an entertaining on-pitch spat with Carlton Palmer at Bramall Lane and a shocking account of David Webb callously cancelling Booker's contract after the player suffered a bad injury in his second spell at Brentford. This is somewhat mitigated by Webb's later offer of a coaching job which leads to 15 years working at Brighton under six different managers.

Booker eventually retired in 2010 and is earning a living as a driving instructor. Waterman's book is a compelling tribute to Booker's commitment and loyalty to just three clubs and it is also a reminder of an era a relatively short time ago when the lifestyles of ordinary footballers were not so far removed from those who pay their wages.

Chris Dean

## Digging deep



**Breaking Ground**  
Art, archaeology  
and mythology  
edited by Neville Gabie,  
Alan Ward and  
Jason Wood  
Axis Projects, £30

Archaeology and football are not obvious bedfellows. Goalposts or corner flags are unlikely to be uncovered at the Colosseum or even in the medieval substrata of London. Moreover so much of modern football has been committed to film it's easy to think that everything worth knowing has been recorded for posterity.

Yet, classifying this lavishly illustrated quasi-academic book on the excavation of a small section of a long-derelict stadium as a niche product for groundhoppers would be doing it an extreme disservice. It helps that the ground in question, Bradford Park Avenue's eponymous former home, was a grand venue with sweeping terraces, handsome gabled stands and a corner pavilion, not dissimilar to that found at Craven Cottage. This reflects how "the Avenue" were the more successful of Bradford's two teams for many years. Their late-1960s decline, however, was precipitous, with a fourth successive re-election bid failing in 1970, and just four years later they folded.

The club re-formed in the 1980s and now chug along in the National League North, playing at the bleak Horsfall Stadium. Meanwhile, protected from developers by a covenant, the remains of their former ground still lurk in suburban Bradford, bricked up turnstiles shielding terraces blanketed by undergrowth. Enter a team of archaeologists, funded by the National Football Museum and Arts Council England, looking to unlock this time capsule.

On one level *Breaking Ground* serves as a detailed resume of their excavations. There are photos of finds, which ranged from the predictable (studs, debris from demolished stands, holes for the goalposts) to the less expected (marbles, a nappy pin). However, more critical to the success of this book than the actual objects recovered is that, unlike your typical archaeological project, the site had been an active venue well within living memory. This enabled the authors to weave fans' memories and interpretations of the findings between the more descriptive sections.

Among many such anecdotes, it appears that some coins found in the goalmouth area in front of the old Kop were not thrown at visiting goalkeepers, but spilled during a badly managed half-time collection of donations, dating from one of Avenue's episodes of financial meltdown. The aforementioned marbles found nearby were legitimate terrace weaponry: the now late-middle-aged miscreant responsible even came forward during the dig. More poignant are the photos of Park Avenue supporters collecting once again on the cleared patches of terracing during the dig, and the twisted remains of the last-surviving crush barrier.

Largely due to the multi-author format, *Breaking Ground* is not always coherent in style or content, jumping from a potted club history, to an academic archaeological report complete with soil strata, to a survey of the trees growing on the long abandoned terraces. But these problems are easily transcended. This is a book with heart and soul: not so much due to the facts or artefacts uncovered by the project, but in digging up memories of matchday experiences that photos and film of past match action can't bring back.

Chris Stride