'An entertaining romp, a comfortable armchair ride crammed with colourful detail'
Barney Ronay, *Literary Review*

EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE WORLD

BRITAIN, SPORT & THE 1980s

ROGER DOMENEGHETTI



'Comprehensive… Illuminates our own time too'
Simon Kuper, *Spectator*



ROGER DOMENEGHETTI

Roger Domeneghetti is a senior lecturer in journalism at Northumbria University. His first book, *From the Back Page to the Front Room: Football's Journey Through the English Media*, was shortlisted for the 2015 Lord Aberdare Literary Prize for Sports History, and received widespread critical praise.

Prior to this, he worked as a journalist for more than twenty years in both print and new media. He continues to work as a freelancer for a variety of publications including the *Blizzard*, *New European*, *BBC History Magazine*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *Wisden Cricket Monthly*.

Copyrighted Material

ALSO BY ROGER DOMENEGHETTI

From the Back Page to the Front Room: Football's Journey Through the English Media

Copyrighted Material

ROGER DOMENEGHETTI

Everybody Wants to Rule the World

Britain, Sport and the 1980s

Copyrighted Material

VINTAGE

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Vintage is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Penguin Random House UK

First published in Vintage in 2024
First published in hardback by Yellow Jersey in 2023

Copyright © Roger Domeneghetti 2024

Roger Domeneghetti has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Tony Harrison, 'V.' (Bloodaxe Books, 1985)
www.bloodaxebooks.com

penguin.co.uk/vintage

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781529114843

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.



Copyrighted Material

For Amy, Lucy and Kes,
with love

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

CONTENTS

Introduction. The Name of the Game 1
Author's note 7

PART I. CULTURE

Chapter 1. The Sun Always Shines on TV 11
Chapter 2. When Will I Be Famous? 33
Chapter 3. Born in the USA 60
Chapter 4. Let's Get Physical 77

PART II. IDENTITY

Chapter 5. Sisters Are Doin' It For Themselves 107
Chapter 6. A Little Respect 133
Chapter 7. People Are People 158

PART III. CONFLICT

Chapter 8. Where the Streets Have No Name 193
Chapter 9. Two Tribes 221
Chapter 10. We're Living in Violent Times 245

PART IV. POLITICS

Chapter 11. Under Pressure 277
Chapter 12. Rebel Yell 300
Chapter 13. Money For Nothing 325
Chapter 14. There Is a Light That Never Goes Out 353

Copyrighted Material

Epilogue. World in Motion 381
Bibliography 393
Notes 409
Acknowledgements 429
Index 431

Copyrighted Material

INTRODUCTION

The Name of the Game

FOR Britain, the 1980s arguably began when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister and entered Downing Street on 4 May 1979 and ended when she left tearfully on 28 November 1990. The country was a very different place when her time in office finished than it had been at the start. Whatever your politics, it is hard to argue that any other twentieth-century prime minister, outside of wartime, had such an impact on the country. The phrase for which she is perhaps best known is 'There is no such thing as society'. It is actually a slight misquote, but it resonated because it neatly summed up the core tenet of Thatcherism, her political ideology, which rejected the post-war consensus and mixed aggressive free-market capitalism with a strong emphasis on law and order and a disdain for civil liberties. Her attitudes towards the welfare state, labour relations, the economy, race and sexuality were all infused with this philosophy. And, in various ways, we're still living with the effects of Thatcher's legacy today, one reason the 1980s still seem so close.

Yet we all experience these epochs differently, dependent on where we live, who we live with and how much money we have to live on. The high points of most decades pass the majority of people by. For how many did the twenties really roar or the sixties

Copyrighted Material

really swing? Despite this, there is a temptation to imagine a shared collective experience: 'the eighties'. In part that's because, thanks to television, we were increasingly sharing communal experiences. Only 80,000 people were present at Wembley for the Live Aid concert in 1985, but millions more, billions more around the world, watched on television. It was because of TV that sport also became a regular communal event during the 1980s. Major sporting events began to draw large television audiences in the 1950s – the 1966 World Cup final is still the most watched television event in British history – but it wasn't until the 1980s that television companies in Britain really began to understand the true value of sport as content and the amount of sport we could watch grew. Throughout the decade we gathered in our millions, separate but together, to cheer on as cricketers put the Aussies to the sword, snooker players duked it out to the last black of the last frame, ice skaters executed perfect routines and middle-distance runners pushed each other to their limits.

Yet one wonders how often the woman who defined the decade was watching. Margaret Thatcher seemed curiously divorced from all of this. Although her husband Denis was a keen golfer and a rugby referee and her son took part in the 1982 Paris–Dakar rally, famously getting lost for six days, Thatcher had little interest in sport. Her successor, John Major, suggested that 'She tried occasionally to show an interest and dutifully turned up to watch great sporting events, but always looked rather out of place.'[1] Her most active involvement, both publicly and politically, came at moments of controversy or crisis. Her time in power was bookended by two major sporting incidents. Within nine months of her first entering No. 10, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. It was a chance for Thatcher to flex her muscles on the international stage and demonstrate her anti-Soviet credentials and led to her government, ultimately unsuccessfully, exerting

Copyrighted Material

significant pressure on British athletes not to attend the Moscow Olympics in 1980. Eighteen months before she left office, ninety-five Liverpool fans died in a crush during an FA Cup semi-final against Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough (over the following decades the death toll would grow to ninety-seven).

It's perhaps because of Thatcher's disinterest in sport that too often historians seem to divorce it from the rest of 1980s society. If it's there, it's either relegated to its own chapter, or reduced to anecdote, an unloved footnote to supposedly more important events. In either case, the deep connections between sport and the rest of society tend to go unrecognised or ignored. It's easy, for example, to suggest that hooliganism was football's problem and had nothing to do with wider society. But was that really the case when the country was also beset by numerous inner-city riots and the violence of the miners' strike? Likewise, the stadium disasters at Valley Parade in Bradford and Hillsborough in Sheffield: were they indicative only of the way football was run, or a mirror of the litany of public-service disasters that beset the country in the latter half of the decade?

A more nuanced understanding would acknowledge that modern sport is a microcosm of society beyond the field of play. It tells us something fundamental about the era in which it takes place, reflecting the cultural trends, contested identities and areas of conflict of the time. As such, sport is the key to understanding what really happened to Britain in the 1980s, one of the most dramatic, turbulent, divisive and colourful decades of the twentieth century. By examining key sports events, performances and personalities and setting them in the context of a period of major social, political and cultural change, I endeavour to show not only that sport is a mirror of society but also what its reflection tells us about Britain during that decade.

Copyrighted Material

I also believe that many aspects of the way we live today have been shaped by trends which developed around sport in the 1980s.

In all aspects of life during those years, sport challenged and changed Britain. It was a transitional decade which saw sport and society become highly mediatised, hyper-commercialised and commodified and during which sport became truly part of the national conversation, something that we now take for granted and only appreciate when it is taken away from us, such as during the first coronavirus lockdown. The 1980s also saw the growth of identity politics and the start of a culture war which, although not always having been labelled as such, is constantly being fought, at certain times more aggressively, such as now, post-Brexit. The 1980s was another such period, the sporting arena being a battlefield on which these identities were expressed and contested.

These themes are explored in the book's four sections. The first, *Culture*, charts the pivotal relationship between sport and the media and the rising impact of television in what were also the last years before sport was repackaged, and in many cases privatised, made available only to those willing to pay to watch. It shows how this helped define modern celebrity and accelerate the Americanisation of British culture. The second section, *Identity*, looks at how successful black sportsmen and women – the children of the Windrush generation – began challenging the negative narratives about young black Britons, while still facing very high levels of racism. It explores the increasing prominence of women's sport despite continued antagonism towards female athletes, and how the demonisation of the gay community, particularly during the moral panic around AIDS, affected gay and bi-sexual sportsmen and women. The third section argues that the 1980s was a decade of *Conflict* played out to a backdrop of the Falklands War, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, industrial disputes such as the miners' strike, and riots across the country. This violence spilled into the sporting arena, particularly the football terraces. The final section, *Politics*, suggests that although Thatcher had

Copyrighted Material

little interest in sport, it was never far from her in-tray, be it the Moscow Olympics, the anti-apartheid boycotts or the horrific tragedies that beset football, a game that embraced her financial policies.

I hope you enjoy revisiting, or visiting for the first time, the sporting landscape of the decade. I also hope that the book shows that sport is inextricably linked to, and can help us understand, the society and culture in which it takes place. As such, the legacy of 1980s sport has much to tell us about ourselves, for it was during that decade that we began to see the outline of what we might call twenty-first-century Britain develop.

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book gives an overview of a decade in which racism, sexism and homophobia were endemic and overt in British culture and society. To that end, language which some will find shocking, and most will (and all should) find unacceptable has, at times, been retained. This has not been done to offend, but to offer a true picture of the prejudices of the 1980s. It was, sadly, the grim reality of the era and that cannot and should not be erased. History is not always pleasant to re-examine, not least because doing so sometimes makes us realise how little has changed, but that does not mean we should pretend it did not happen.

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

PART I:
CULTURE

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

CHAPTER 1

The Sun Always Shines on TV

I

AT JUST past midnight on the last Sunday of April 1985, Steve Davis, then the best snooker player in the world, watched in disbelief as his hopes of a third successive world title slipped through his fingers. 'The Golden Nugget', as he was known by his fans, held a comfortable 8–0 lead after the first frame of the second session. However, his opponent Dennis Taylor had doggedly clung on, eventually squaring the match 17–17 to set up a winner-takes-all final frame. Even then, Davis had led 62–44 with four coloured balls remaining; he needed just one, his opponent all four. Taylor potted the brown, the blue and the pink to take the score to 62–59 but missed the black. After nearly fifteen hours at the table over two days, it all came down to the final ball. The players traded safety shots and missed pots before Taylor, having never been ahead in the match, finally sunk the black to take the crown. As the Northern Irishman pumped the air in triumph with his cue, Davis could only look on, forlorn. Despite the late hour, some 18.5 million people stayed awake to see Taylor's victory. Yet those inside Sheffield's Crucible Theatre were unaware that nearly a third of the population of the country were glued to their sets

Copyrighted Material

watching the drama unfold. 'We were in the goldfish bowl,' says Barry Hearn, Davis' manager.[1] 'It wasn't until the Monday or Tuesday that we saw the figures and thought "Fuck!". Great sport evolves. It was like Agatha Christie's best ever book and you didn't know who did it until the last page. That's a very special one-off.'

The iconic final was BBC2's most watched programme of the year and had the largest viewing figures for any programme extending beyond midnight.[2] That the audience was so vast was indicative not just of the appeal of sport but also that in the 1980s watching television was still a communal, national experience. Viewers had yet to fracture across numerous satellite and cable channels. The internet, social media and streaming services did not exist. In 1981 20.3 million households in Britain, approximately 97.6 per cent, had at least one television set,[3] and yet often there hardly seemed anything worth watching. At the start of the decade there were just three channels: BBC1, BBC2 and ITV. Prior to midday, content had a decidedly beige feel and was aimed at Open University students and schoolchildren. The two BBC channels regularly shut down for an hour or so at lunchtime. Broadcasts ended before midnight with the news, weather, a brief look at the next day's schedule and a polite reminder to turn off your set after the national anthem. Then the screen went blank and, for those who hadn't been paying attention, began to emit a high-pitched whine as one last prompt to hit the 'off' button.

By the end of the 1980s, the TV landscape had changed beyond all recognition. Channel 4 made its debut in November 1982 (although, initially it didn't start until 5 p.m. and around 13 per cent of households couldn't access it). Two months later, in January 1983, the BBC launched the country's first breakfast television show. Its commercial rival TV-am started a fortnight later. Satellite dishes and squarials began appearing on houses in 1989, the now-defunct British Satellite Broadcasting company and its

Copyrighted Material

rival Sky Television giving a glimpse of the even more diverse future to come. Suddenly the schedules opened up and there were hours of time to fill. Viewers had a choice, the watchword of the free-market Thatcherite ethos built on individual and personal freedom. Content became slicker and more professional. Soap operas, dramas and quiz shows, even an advertisement for Gold Blend coffee, could pull in tens of millions of viewers. The BBC launched a gameshow, *Telly Addicts*, hosted by Noel Edmonds, to celebrate the growing national obsession with the box.

Coverage of sport also changed significantly during the decade. At the turn of the 1980s, sport accounted for around 12 per cent of the BBC's output and just slightly less for ITV.[4] Both broadcasters had long acknowledged that some events – for example, the football World Cup and the Olympics – had huge pulling power which they were willing to rip up their schedules to accommodate. These competitions, and a select few others, were also deemed to be central to a supposed shared national culture, in large part determined by the Oxbridge, amateur ethos that pervaded both sports administration and the BBC at the time. Back in 1956, a like-minded Conservative government, unwilling to allow these sports to be sullied by commercialisation, had stepped in to mitigate the effects of the free market by creating so-called 'listed' sports: the 'crown jewels'.* At face value this benefited both broadcasters as they could each show the events at the same time. However, in essence it decreased their value to ITV, which needed exclusivity to court lucrative advertising deals, thereby effectively giving the BBC a monopoly. Beyond this, most other

* The events were: the football World Cup, the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games when held in the UK, the FA Cup final, Wimbledon, Test match cricket, the Derby, the Grand National and the Oxford vs Cambridge Boat Race.

Copyrighted Material

sports were seen as cheap programming, filler to offset the cost of more expensive dramas, and thus coverage consisted mainly of highlights, or magazine shows which offered a veritable smorgasbord. Take, for example, the global menu on offer from Grandstand on Saturday 26 January 1980. There was half an hour of *Football Focus*, followed by boxing from London's Royal Albert Hall. Soon viewers were in Chamonix, France, for World Cup skiing, before they were transported to Gothenburg, Sweden, for the European Figure Skating Championships. Then it was back to the UK for coverage of the national basketball final in Sheffield, national indoor athletics from RAF Cosford and the opening game of rugby league's European Championship between Wales and France in Widnes. Then it was down to Adelaide for highlights of the third Test between Australia and the West Indies before, finally, the football results. All this was interspersed with racing from Cheltenham.[5]

Yet the growing need to compete for viewers in increasingly crowded schedules meant broadcasters moved away from the likes of *Grandstand,* and its ITV rival *World of Sport*, in favour of live events. This was particularly important for the commercial ITV network which relied on revenue from advertisers, who were in turn attracted by the programmes that could deliver large viewing figures but also, and crucially, viewers with high disposable incomes. This process was accelerated with the advent of satellite TV, where sport could be used not just to pull in audiences for specific events and timeslots but also to promote subscription to entire channels. The listed sports aside, suddenly everything was up for grabs to the highest bidder and battles for broadcast rights became increasingly common. At the same time, the need for live events plus the competition for them also saw broadcasters look beyond the narrow range that had dominated coverage to that point. Sports that had received little coverage were suddenly thrust into the spotlight.

Copyrighted Material

II

When Taylor beat Davis at the Crucible in Sheffield in 1985, colour TV had been available in Britain for less than twenty years, the service having made its debut on BBC2 with coverage of the 1967 Wimbledon Championships. By 1972 about 1.5 million people had a colour TV licence. Within six years that number had risen to eleven million,[6] accounting for more than half of all licences. To avoid simply using imported programmes and repeats, home-produced colour content was needed and the channel again looked to sport. In the black and white era snooker made little sense on television. The World Championship had received some brief coverage of highlights in the 1950s but watching players potting balls of various shades of grey on a light grey table was confusing and not particularly entertaining viewing. In reality, it could be a vibrant sport thanks to the green baize of the table and twenty-two balls of eight different colours, perfect for the new medium. To capitalise on this, in 1969 *Pot Black*, a non-ranking competition featuring the world's best eight players in quick-fire, knockout rounds, was commissioned. Initially the coverage had to accommodate viewers without the benefit of colour sets, leading to the memorable occasion when commentator 'Whispering' Ted Lowe explained: 'Steve is going for the pink ball; and for those of you who are watching in black and white, the pink is next to the green'.[7] No one had particularly high expectations for the show, which was fundamentally designed to promote colour TV, not snooker, yet *Pot Black* defied expectations, quickly becoming one of BBC2's most popular programmes.

The Welsh amateur champion Ray Reardon was the first to win the small gold *Pot Black* trophy and pocket the £1,000 prize money. Seeing him and other former and future world champions

Copyrighted Material

inspired some youngsters who would go on to dominate the sport in the 1980s. Steve Davis, reminiscing about watching *Pot Black* with his father, called the show 'a breath of fresh air' because 'it was really the first time you could watch snooker on television'.[8] It wasn't until 1980 that the BBC first broadcast live coverage of the World Championship, held at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, from the opening day of the tournament and they also planned to broadcast complete coverage of the final, split between BBC1 and BBC2. The match was a close affair between Alex Higgins, who had won the World Championship eight years earlier, and Canada's Cliff Thorburn, who would eventually win the title. Higgins played an uncharacteristically measured game to establish leads of 7–3 and 9–5; however, his usual flamboyance crept back in, and the pair were tied 9–9 at the end of the first day. Over the course of the next day, they traded frames, neither at any point being more than two ahead. Those watching were engrossed, yet just as the match was entering its tense, final stages, at 7.23 p.m. on the Monday evening, the BBC cut away to footage of the SAS storming the Iranian Embassy in London (in most people's memories it is 'live' but in reality it was slightly delayed). The embassy had been taken over six days earlier by dissident Iranians opposed to Ayatollah Khomeini, demanding the release of Iranian Arabs in their homeland. At the same time, they had taken twenty-six hostages. The raid was over within seventeen minutes. When the smoke had cleared, the SAS had burnished its reputation as the world's most elite military unit. Margaret Thatcher, just three days into her second year as prime minister, had established the hallmarks of her hardline approach to terrorism. Despite the gravity of the situation in London, the BBC was inundated with complaints from snooker fans who wanted to stay with the match. Some even rang the stage door of the Crucible Theatre to complain.[9] If the 1985 final was 'the high watermark

Copyrighted Material

of snooker's appeal',[10] then the 1980 final was when the sport first demonstrated the full extent of its popularity. 'The fact that they went back and forwards between the siege and the snooker was incredibly complimentary to snooker,' says Hearn. 'And the fact that some people said: "Who gives a shit about the siege, you've taken off my snooker" was a statement about the size of snooker at that time.'

Commentator Ted Lowe had calmly segued from coverage of the final to coverage of the siege with another immortal line: 'And now from one Embassy to another.'[11] The World Championships had quickly become synonymous with the cigarette brand Embassy, highlighting the growing attraction of televised sports to sponsors. For tobacco companies, this attraction had been heightened in 1965 when the government banned the advertising of their products on TV. Prior to the ban, sports sponsorship in Britain was worth less than £1 million. By 1970 this had more than doubled to £2.5 million. By 1980, the figure stood at £46 million and it hit £100 million in 1983.[12] At the end of the decade it was estimated that sponsorship was worth between £200 and £275 million to sport, with support spending worth as much again.[13] While not all sponsorship came from cigarette companies, by 1986 five of the top six events measured by the amount of coverage were tobacco-sponsored, with Rothmans, John Player and Benson and Hedges leading the way. Embassy had offered £24,000 in total prize money for the 1978 World Snooker Championships. That had risen to £300,000 by 1985. On top of that, the company were spending about £250,000 behind the scenes on sets, hospitality and accommodating journalists. However, they saw this as 'the media buy of the century'.[14] For an outlay of around £500,000 they were getting the equivalent of advertising worth £75 million. All this on the supposedly advertisement-free BBC.

Copyrighted Material

In 1982, Higgins finally regained the world title that he craved. Having beaten Ray Reardon in the final, the emotion became too much for the new champion. Tears of joy – and perhaps relief – streamed down his face. Victory showed that he wasn't just was a great player; it also suggested that things hadn't spiralled too far out of control for this mercurial character. Higgins beckoned to his wife Lynn in the crowd to bring their eighteenth-month-old daughter, Lauren, to him. The familial tableau became an iconic image, and Hearn is in no doubt it gave snooker a further boost. 'Tears are always important if you're growing things,' he says. 'Tessa Sanderson winning the gold medal [at the 1984 Olympics], Gascoigne at Italia '90. There's nothing like a tear. Great moments in all sport – they live with you forever.' It is of no small significance that the rise of televised snooker in the 1980s came at a time when there was very little live coverage of football. Only internationals, domestic cup finals and some European games involving British teams were deemed worthy of coverage. The first, and for more than two decades, only, live broadcast of the English Football League had come on an autumnal Friday night in September 1960 when the second half of Bolton's 1–0 win away at Blackpool was shown by ABC, one of the then-ITV networks. The League had only allowed coverage after half-time because it believed that TV coverage would divert fans from turning up. Over the years, it rebuffed various offers for live rights for this reason and when the attendance at Bloomfield Road was lower than average, their fears were seemingly confirmed. Plans to cover other games on a similar basis were dropped. Somewhat astonishingly given today's saturation coverage, television was seen as a novelty which would not significantly benefit the game's finances.

Copyrighted Material

This view had undergone a dramatic re-evaluation across mainland Europe during the 1970s. Taking their cue from the

development of TV sport in the USA a decade earlier, and increasingly sophisticated advertising research that showed that domestic football could deliver large, high-value audiences (that is, free-spending young men), the football authorities in Italy, Germany, Spain, and France realised that the future of the game was intertwined with the small screen. Furthermore, they understood that the game itself would become more valuable to television companies. In tandem, the amount of coverage increased, and the leagues demanded higher rights fees. However, in Britain, there was, beyond a few exceptions, such as Robert Maxwell, the chairman of Oxford United, and David Dein and Irving Scholar, at Arsenal and Tottenham respectively, continued hesitancy. The English Football League bowed to the increasingly inevitable and agreed a deal worth £5.2 million to show twenty live games during the 1983/84 and 1984/85 seasons.[15] Scotland would not see a league game broadcast live until 1986.

The first live game broadcast, in October 1983, saw Spurs play Nottingham Forest at White Hart Lane. Before the match, there were concerns that fans, used only to edited highlights, would be bored by the coverage of an entire game, which included the 'dull' parts as well. However, such fears proved unfounded. The broadcasts regularly pulled in more than ten million viewers, a revelation given Sunday afternoons had previously been considered a dead slot. The attendances of games were unaffected. There was little analysis focused on the match at White Hart Lane. Instead host Jim Rosenthal, pundit Jimmy Greaves and Spurs chairman Douglas Alexiou discussed the coverage. 'As far as you're concerned, football and television can live quite happily together this season?' Rosenthal asked Alexiou. 'I think we got on quite well today,' replied the Spurs chairman.[16]

Such bonhomie didn't last long. Despite being rivals, when it came to football the BBC and ITV effectively operated a cartel,

Copyrighted Material

acting as the sole purchaser of football rights. Thus, when they came to renegotiate their deal with the League ahead of the 1985/86 season, they were able to present a united front and play hardball. They offered a four-year deal worth £3.8 million a year for the rights to cover sixteen League games, two League Cup semi-finals legs and the League Cup final. The League rejected the offer and, in response, the TV companies left their offer on the table but walked away from negotiations. Jonathan Martin, the BBC's Head of Sport, said, simply, that he would continue to show snooker instead; it was cheaper and more popular. 'Soccer is no longer at the heart of the TV schedules,' he said matter-of-factly, 'and is never likely to be again.'[17]

As we shall see in Chapter 10, at the time football was beset by hooliganism and suffering a crisis that some considered to be existential. The month before Taylor beat Davis at the Crucible, Luton and Millwall fans fought running battles with each other and the police during an FA Cup quarter-final. Eighty-one people were injured, mostly police, and thirty-one arrested. Within a fortnight of Taylor's triumph, fifty-six died as fire consumed a stand at Bradford's Valley Parade ground. On the same day, a teenager died after a wall collapsed during fighting at Birmingham's St Andrew's. Before the end of the month, thirty-nine more people were killed after Liverpool and Juventus fans rioted at the European Cup final at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels. The *Sunday Times* branded football 'a slum sport played in slum stadiums increasingly watched by slum people, who deter decent folk from turning up'.[18] While the derogatory language unfairly tarred all football fans with the same brush, failing to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority were in fact themselves 'decent people', the newspaper had a point about the effect on attendance figures. In the 1984/85 football season, just 17.8 million people went through the turnstiles in all four divisions of the Football League,[19]

Copyrighted Material

fewer than were still awake watching when Taylor beat Davis. It was the lowest combined attendance figure since the Second World War. In the 1986/87 season it would fall again, to 16.4 million. Not only were there fewer fans present, but the stalemate between the League and the broadcasters meant there were no television cameras present either. Even *Match of the Day* was off the air. In December 1984 the League caved in and signed a deal worth £1.5 million for the remainder of the season and the following July they signed a two-year deal worth £3.1 million. Both were on worse terms than they had initially been offered. It was a salutary lesson for the League. In the mid-1980s, football was not yet the thoroughbred that would come to dominate the TV landscape; it was just one of many sports jockeying for position.

III

Darts was one of those other sports. The 1972 final of the *News of the World* Darts Championship attracted some seven million viewers, popularity that led to the creation of *The Indoor League* which featured darts and other saloon bar sports such as bar skittles, arm wrestling, shove ha'penny and billiards. For all its success, the programme had an unashamedly rudimentary feel. It wasn't until darts got regular coverage with the production values afforded to other sports that it really took off. This came with the creation of the Embassy World Darts Championships, the inaugural tournament being held at Nottingham's Heart of the Midlands club in 1978. There were just thirteen entrants, indicative of the relatively early stage of darts' development as a professional sport. The BBC broadcast the final live with highlights from the other rounds.

Copyrighted Material

By 1980, the tournament had moved to Jollees Cabaret Venue

in Stoke-on-Trent and the BBC devoted live coverage to all rounds of the tournament. The final, which was played between two of the game's most flamboyant characters, Bobby George and Eric Bristow, took the popularity of the sport to another level. 'Eric used to say to me, we changed the darts completely,' George tells me.[20] 'We made it more entertaining. It all snowballed from there.' George had only started playing darts seriously in 1976, but he took to the sport easily. He knew Bristow, twelve years his junior, well, the pair having played doubles and exhibition matches together. They knew each other's game and the final was close-fought. George made the early running, but the younger man eventually asserted his dominance in the seventh and eighth sets. After Bristow hit a double ten to take the match five sets to three, he planted a victorious kiss on the cheek of his vanquished friend.

Bristow's celebration was in keeping with the showmanship and entertainment the pair brought to the sport. Unlike their contemporaries, both players had nicknames – Bristow was 'the Crafty Cockney', George was known as 'Bobby Dazzler' – something which is commonplace nowadays. Each crafted an on-stage image, which also translated well onto television. Bristow dressed all in red, his nickname emblazoned above a Union Jack on the back of his shirt. George wore all black, his shirt embroidered with gold sequins and 'B' and 'G' on the lapels. 'I took the idea for the shirts from the ice skaters,' says George. 'I thought it would make the sport more entertaining and that whatever happened, people would remember me. If I played badly, they'd say, "Did you see that idiot Bobby George all dressed up in the sequins?" Because I had all the glitter, and I looked like Liberace, two tournament officials gave me a candelabra all lit up as I walked on the stage. I thought, "Oh well, here you go you'll look a pratt," but the audience all got their lighters out. Over the week, the crowd got louder and louder, chanting our names. By the end, I noticed two

Copyrighted Material

or three guys in the audience in sequinned shirts. I thought, "Bloody hell! That didn't take long."'

By the time of the tournament, the now familiar split-screen technique, which showed the board on one side and a close-up of the thrower's face on the other, had become a staple of the coverage. Pioneered during the inaugural World Championship in 1978, it was as revolutionary as the introduction of colour television had been for snooker just a decade earlier. 'Sport is only as good as the presentation and the technology,' George says. 'Darts is a fast game to actually cover on television. They couldn't switch from the camera on the player to the camera on the board quickly enough. But when they split the screen, they could see the player's action and the board at the same time.' Not only were those watching at home able to soak up the heightened atmosphere, but thanks to the innovative production technique they were able to see the rollercoaster of emotions that the competitors experienced. 'Darts could have been invented especially for television,' opined *The Times* in a preview of the tournament. 'The close-up comes into its own – the tense hand, the gleaming eye, the dampness on the brow, the aborted grin, the gnawed lip. This is a man under pressure, without artifice.'[21] Split screen also helped make the players more recognisable to the public. 'Having a focus on your face – that's how everyone knew you,' says George.

To the delight of the BBC, the organisers and sponsors, eight million people tuned in to see Bristow's win. By the middle of the 1980s, the number of tournaments being organised by the British Darts Organisation (BDO) had increased significantly, with as many as sixteen receiving regular coverage on both the BBC and ITV. The players, too, were enjoying increased exposure. Soon, Bristow was on *Punchlines* and *Celebrity Squares*; he even played the drums to 'I Shot the Sheriff' on *The Leo Sayer Variety Show*. George also became an entertainment show regular. 'I was on all sorts,' he

Copyrighted Material

says. 'I was on *Rod Hull and Emu*, *Saturday Superstore*, *Juke Box Jury*. Television makes you. I became a celebrity without throwing darts.'

IV

Very quicky the popularity of both darts and snooker spilled over into wider popular culture. In 1984, a pre-Live Aid Bob Geldof starred in the film *Number One* as an amateur snooker player pressured to play professionally by a local gangster. *The Last Election*, a 1986 novel by Pete Davies, told the story of a dystopian near-future London, where a cable TV channel called *147* broadcast snooker to the unemployed masses twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Three years later darts played a central role in Martin Amis' *London Fields*. Perhaps the peak was reached when Dexys Midnight Runners performed 'Jackie Wilson Said', an ode to the soul singer, on *Top of the Pops* in front of a huge photo of Jocky Wilson, then world darts champion. Long believed to be an error, Dexys lead singer Kevin Rowland revealed the band had requested the photo as a laugh.[22] This was indicative of a wider fusion of sport and entertainment, which was central to a range of TV shows such as *Superstars*, *Pro-Celebrity Golf* and even, to a certain extent, the garish, rowdy *It's A Knockout*. The relaxed quiz show *A Question of Sport* brought sports stars into living rooms every week, peaking in the ratings in 1987 when Princess Anne, a European gold medallist in eventing and former BBC Sports Personality of the Year, appeared on the show. A fortnight earlier ex-Liverpool player Emlyn Hughes, one of the regular team captains, had misidentified a photo of the princess, albeit covered in mud after a horse race, as the jockey John Reid. When told who it actually was, Hughes was mortified, exclaiming, 'they'll hang me'. His horror was further compounded when host David Coleman told

Copyrighted Material

him that the princess was due to be a guest a fortnight later. It set her appearance up nicely and some nineteen million viewers tuned in to see her good-natured banter with Hughes.

A pseudo gameshow, *A Question of Sport* benefited from the fast-growing popularity of the genre with an increasingly aspirational population. This, coupled with their low cost relative to sitcoms and drama, saw gameshows, which had been around since the 1950s, fill up the schedules. *3-2-1*, hosted by Ted Rodgers and Dusty Bin, led the way, having first been broadcast in 1978, but the boom really began with *Play Your Cards Right* and *Family Fortunes*. Hosted by Bruce Forsyth and Bob Monkhouse respectively, the shows both made their debuts in 1980. Other versions of the genre ranged from cerebral offerings such as *Blockbusters* and *Countdown* to the unashamedly materialist *The Price Is Right*. One of the most popular was *Bullseye*, which combined general knowledge with skill at the oche. The show was hosted by Lancastrian stand-up comic Jim Bowen, who had made his name on the club circuit before gaining national exposure on ITV's *The Comedians*. He was aided by professional darts referee Tony Green counting the scores, and Bully, an overweight, anthropomorphic cartoon bull. Bowen was not a slick host by modern standards, often fluffing his lines or appearing to mishear contestants, especially when they were talking about themselves. But his avuncular charm and catchphrases such as 'Super, smashing, great!', 'You can't beat a bit of bully!' and, agonisingly, 'Here's what you would have won,' made him an engaging and popular host. It was a ratings winner, pulling in more than seventeen million viewers in 1982.[23] The format was so successful it was subsequently applied to snooker, first with *Pot the Question*, which lasted just one series in 1984, and then more successfully in the 1990s with *Big Break*.

Bullseye was still regularly getting ten million viewers when it was cancelled in 1995,[24] its popularity further demonstrating the

Copyrighted Material

mass appeal of a sport that a little more than a decade earlier had been merely a competitive, pub pastime. Yet not all the attention darts got was positive. In a reflection of the sport's roots, many of the players drank beer and smoked during the games. The satirical *Not the Nine O'Clock News* lampooned such behaviour in a sketch featuring Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones with pillows stuffed up their shirts as two stereotypical overweight players, Dai 'Fat Belly' Gutbucket and Tommy 'Even Fatter Belly' Belcher. The pair took turns to down drinks, not throw darts, with a referee calling out what was required of the competitors: 'Fat Belly, you require three triple Bacardis.' The sketch aired a few weeks after George had played Bristow in the 1980 final. 'I thought that was good,' George tells me. 'Everyone else complained, but I thought that was really funny. If they're taking the piss out of the sport, then it's recognised. When they're not taking the piss, that means no one knows about it.' However, he doesn't think the stereotype the sketch fed off was an entirely accurate depiction. 'I never had a beer gut, Eric never had a beer gut, John Lowe never had a beer gut. There was Leighton Reece – he had two beer guts – but that image of big bellies and swilling beer was all that some people thought of the sport and that wasn't fair.' The representation was demonstrative of a condescending attitude from some towards what was fundamentally a working-class sport. These negative experiences showed that despite the popularity, the glitz and the glamour, darts couldn't shed its saloon-bar image.

V

Yet, thanks to the BBC's coverage, sports like darts and snooker gained a measure of respectability and credibility they would not otherwise have had. 'The BBC had the power to make any

Copyrighted Material

change,' says Hearn. 'They were omnipotent. They always had the arrogance of being the state broadcaster, a bit of monopoly, an air of "we can do it better than anyone else". But they did have power because if the BBC put it on screen, it meant it was real. It was almost "by royal approval".' Yet Hearn believes that, while the BBC helped create the modern market for live televised sport, they were quickly left behind by the technological and particularly financial transformation their coverage triggered. 'They did the protected, listed events,' he says, 'but when the money came, they couldn't afford to play the game. The BBC had all the trappings but no money and no desire to change the status quo. While they were stuck in their ways, you had ITV with younger people, trying to be a bit more creative.'

One of those younger people was Greg Dyke, who became director of programmes of London Weekend Television (LWT) in 1987. Dyke made his name in the early 1980s as the saviour of the ailing TV-am before moving on to TVS, the ITV franchise covering the South and South East. Three years later, in 1987, he was back in the capital. LWT was faced with a fall in viewers and Dyke quickly identified the problem, saying that the schedules had 'a very old look' and were increasingly reminiscent of the Co-op in an era when people shopped at Sainsbury's.[25] 'One of my major aims was for ITV to lose that fifties reputation it had,' says Dyke.[26] 'It didn't recognise the British working class was in decline, a whole generation of people were coming through who had been to university. You could see that comparing the figures then to the figures a decade or two decades earlier. Britain had moved upmarket, and ITV hadn't.' Out went traditional variety shows such as *Live From . . . The Palladium* and *Cannon and Ball*. In came dramas like *London's Burning* and *Poirot*. Dyke was also increasingly unwilling to schedule the sport acquired and produced centrally by ITV. So, he successfully pushed to become chairman of the ITV Sport committee.

Copyrighted Material

It wasn't just the viewers who were changing; so, too, was the television marketplace. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government was determined to introduce more competition. ITV franchises were, from 1991, to be given to the highest bidder and, as part of a wider policy of deregulation, British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) was awarded the right to broadcast in Britain. On the periphery was Rupert Murdoch's rival Europe-based satellite service Sky Television which, although it did not have a licence, was still able to broadcast to British homes. Dyke was acutely aware of the threat posed by BSB, although he now feels he took the wrong approach in tackling them. 'We still had the rather simplistic view that if we took away their access to the best sport and movies – I also ran another campaign on ITV 'movies are free on ITV' – that we could stop them,' he says. 'We were living in cuckoo land. I would have done far better to have spent my time looking at how we could compete with them, as opposed to how we could defeat them. In other words, we should have gone into pay television much earlier.'

Backed by the likes of Pearson, Granada and Virgin, BSB had a significant war chest. They seemed to be in a position to shake up the stuffy world of television, just as Thatcher wanted. In 1988, they made their first move: an audacious bid for the rights to broadcast the Football League over the next ten years at a guaranteed minimum of £9 million a year. This led to the collapse of the BBC/ITV cartel. All bets were off, and a competitive process began. Dyke knew that losing football to BSB would be hugely detrimental to ITV. He also knew that if he could win the rights, he could deliver a blow to BSB before they had even started broadcasting. He offered £11 million a year for eighteen League games plus the League Cup semi-finals and final. Before the bids could be put to a vote, BSB withdrew.

Copyrighted Material

Dyke discussed his strategy at the Edinburgh Television

Festival later in 1988, the first time that the importance of sport for the medium had been acknowledged at the festival, signifying its increasing value to broadcasters. Dyke accepted that he had overpaid for the football rights, but he also warned that other sports should not expect such largesse. Arguing that sport was 'the last totally uncontrolled area of television', he claimed that there were only a few sports guaranteed to provide the audiences needed to generate high rights fees. Furthermore, to pay for the football, he said, other sports such as bowls, gymnastics, wrestling and even darts would be gone from the ITV schedules by the end of the year.[27] Not only was darts suffering because of the image of beer-swilling players, but it was also experiencing overkill. The huge increase in the number of tournaments broadcast meant viewers were being fed a televised diet with little variation. As quickly as darts had begun to appear on the television schedules, so it disappeared. By 1988 all that was left on the BBC was the Embassy World Championship, while ITV had followed through on Dyke's threat and axed its entire coverage.[28] In his biography, John Lowe argued that 'this wasn't a small decrease; it was the darts world's equivalent of the Wall Street crash'.[29] BDO chief Olly Croft was unconcerned as he was still overseeing around 800 amateur tournaments annually. However, the top professionals suddenly found the lifeblood of the elite sport gone. Without the exposure that television had given them, their main source of income was destroyed, instigating a bruising period for the sport. Sixteen of the top players broke away from the BDO, to form the rival World Darts Council (WDC). The new organisation was willing to embrace the requirements of television, employ marketing and public relations strategies and package the sport in a way that Croft was not. They set about organising their own tournaments and tying up separate TV deals with the newly formed Sky TV. Ultimately darts survived. Other sports weren't so lucky.

Copyrighted Material

At the start of the 1980s wrestling had a TV audience on a par with both snooker and darts. Although it was not a sport in the traditional sense, its fights and their outcomes being choreographed, it had a regular slot on ITV's Saturday afternoon magazine show *World of Sport* between 4.00 and 4.45 p.m., just before the football results. In June 1981 two of the sport's biggest stars (literally and figuratively) took to the ring in front of a sell-out Wembley Arena crowd. In one corner was Big Daddy, a living John Bull Toby jug who stood 6ft 6in. tall and weighed in at 26 stone. Shirley Crabtree, to give him his real name, wore a costume adorned with the Union Jack and was the people's champion. He was adored by children and grannies alike who would chant 'Easy! Easy!' as he entered the fray and dispatched opponents with, well, ease. Despite retiring in the early 1990s, Big Daddy remains one of the most well-known figures in British wrestling. In the other corner was Giant Haystacks, real name Martin Ruane. Big Daddy's arch enemy, Haystacks was 6ft 11in. tall and tipped the scales at a massive 40 stone. The bout is reputed to have been watched by eighteen million people, although that seems apocryphal. Whatever the reality, it was a disappointment, Big Daddy taking less than three minutes to overcome his opponent. It was also wrestling's last hurrah.

Over the second part of the decade the sport was beset by a string of negative publicity. Tony 'Banger' Walsh, Big Daddy's former tag-team partner, gave a tell-all interview to the *Sun*, under the headline 'EXCLUSIVE: Wrestler reveals truth about fake world of grunt 'n' groan'.[30] Walsh not only suggested that the sport was a sham, but so was Big Daddy's child-loving image. Then in 1987 during a bout in Great Yarmouth, Big Daddy pinned his opponent Mal 'King Kong' Kirk to the canvas with his trademark 'splash'. Kirk never regained consciousness and was pronounced dead on arrival at hospital. The resulting inquest found that the

Copyrighted Material

fifty-one-year-old had died as a result of an unknown heart condition, attributing no blame to Big Daddy. However, it left a cloud over the sport. By this time, wrestling had lost its fixed spot in the schedules when in 1985 ITV cancelled *World of Sport*. Wrestling continued with its own show but, unloved, this bounced around the schedules without promotion and was often aired in early, lunchtime slots. Only ardent fans knew when the sport would be shown, and in an era when many working-class people, who made up the majority of the sport's audience, still put in half a day on a Saturday, the viewing figures plummeted. This all put wrestling on Dyke's hit list. In December 1988, when the sport's contract with ITV came to an end, it was counted out for the final time. 'It was old-style ITV; it was ripe for axing,' says Dyke. 'It wasn't a proper sport, nobody won or lost, but I got a lot of flak for it, a lot of people wrote and complained. I still get people today saying, "You're the bloke who took wrestling off." It was forty years ago!'

The following year, wrestling returned to British screens, at least those that were attached to a satellite dish. However, it wasn't the likes of Big Daddy, Giant Haystacks and Kendo Nagasaki in front of the cameras but Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage and Ultimate Warrior from the World Wrestling Federation (WWF). American wrestling had been effectively relaunched by Vince McMahon, WWF's owner, in 1985 with the first WrestleMania, a pay-per-view event. WWF highlights had been broadcast on Sky Television since its early days. McMahon could offer it as cheap content, having already recouped his costs and more in its home market. He used the increased exposure as an opportunity to expand into a new market. By 1992 the WWF had become so popular in Britain that its fifth annual SummerSlam event was held at Wembley Stadium with more than 80,000 fans in attendance, to date still the largest WWE event outside the USA.

Copyrighted Material

It's hard not to wonder whether British wrestling might have

won a reprieve if ITV's contractual commitment to the sport had lasted a year or two longer, or if the WWF boom on Sky had begun a couple of years earlier. Would the glitz and glamour of their US cousins have rubbed off on Big Daddy and his peers? Perhaps, but it would have taken more than just that. The WWF aggressively courted a younger audience through links with MTV and singers such as Cyndi Lauper. It had a roster of compelling characters involved in soap opera-style storylines which played out in weekly pre-recorded shows before culminating in huge pay-per-view bouts. By contrast, British wrestling had been operating the same business model since the 1950s and its focus on Big Daddy had become stale. Its demise reflected the need for sports to be packaged in a way that appealed to the audience that television, advertisers and sponsors wanted, a characteristic that is so commonplace today it is all but unnoticeable. This was a crucial development for televised sport in the 1980s – it became increasingly merged with entertainment, and entertainment needed stars.

Copyrighted Material

CHAPTER 2

When Will I Be Famous?

I

ON a bright autumn afternoon in 1985, ITV sports reporter Martin Tyler took to London's Waterloo Bridge to film a segment for the football show *Saint and Greavsie*. Over the course of an hour or so, he asked various passers-by what they thought of the West Ham striker Frank McAvennie. Unsurprisingly, the response was overwhelmingly positive, as McAvennie was scoring goals for fun in the English First Division. Then Tyler asked if they knew who the young man with bleached-blond hair standing next to him was. Few did, and they were surprised to discover it was McAvennie himself. While many people had heard about the Scot's exploits on the pitch, following a £340,000 move that summer from St Mirren in Scotland to West Ham, very few had actually seen them (or him). The television blackout caused by a breakdown in negotiations between the Football League and ITV and the BBC meant that just nine of the twenty-eight goals McAvennie scored in his explosive debut season at Upton Park were caught on camera. Manchester United fans also missed their team's imperious start. Looking to build on their FA Cup triumph the previous season, when they beat Everton 1–0, the team managed by 'Big Ron' Atkinson romped to

Copyrighted Material

victory in their first ten League games and were unbeaten in their first fifteen, a run which took them nine points clear of Liverpool and thirteen clear of champions Everton.

It was perhaps fitting that after the League eventually capitulated and agreed a deal with the broadcasters in December 1985, West Ham's third round FA Cup tie at Charlton early in the New Year was the first game broadcast. The public at large finally got to see McAvennie in action and he delivered, lobbing the goalkeeper from just inside the area before his strike partner Tony Cottee beat an onrushing defender to poke home the only goal of the game. Over the course of the season, the pair racked up fifty-four goals between them as the Hammers reached the FA Cup quarter-finals and finished third – the club's best finish to date – behind the Merseyside duo Liverpool and Everton. Manchester United had been unable to keep up their early season form, winning just five of their final seventeen games. They were bystanders as Liverpool accrued thirty-four points from a possible thirty-six in the run-in, romping to the first part of a historic double in Kenny Dalglish's first season as manager.

McAvennie finished second in the race for the Golden Boot, behind Everton's Gary Lineker, but he was the undisputed star of the season. Although the lack of television exposure meant that, initially, few recognised him, it took just one chat-show appearance for the Scot to gain celebrity status. *Wogan* went out three times a week, and thanks to host Terry Wogan's easy-going self-deprecation and gentle mocking of his guests, it regularly gained viewing figures in excess of ten million.[1] Suddenly McAvennie's name had a face. 'People with no interest in football knew who I was,' he later told the *Irish Post*. 'I went to meet my mum for lunch the next day and people were asking me for autographs at the airport. I was at Stringfellows on the Saturday night and the press were waiting on me.'[2]

Copyrighted Material

McAvennie's sudden ascent to fame was indicative of the power of television in the 1980s and there was one sportsman who stood astride the decade like a colossus. Ian Botham had burst into the England cricket team as a twenty-one-year-old in 1977 just as their football counterparts were in the process of failing to qualify for a second successive World Cup. His powers began to wane in the early 1990s around the time Paul Gascoigne was wiping the tears from his eyes. During the summers of the 1980s Botham filled a vacuum, showcasing his talents on TV for days at a time when football had barely any live coverage. In the process he transcended both cricket, and sport in general, to become a cultural icon.

II

Botham's England debut came in the shadow of Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket revolution. Rebuffed in his attempts to buy the rights to the Australian home Test series for his Channel 9 TV station, Packer launched his own competition. He signed up seventy of the world's best players, including most of the top Australian and West Indies players, and staged sixteen so-called 'Supertests' and thirty-eight one-day matches. After two seasons of innovative floodlit day/night matches, white balls, coloured kits, even players wearing helmets, a truce was called. The Australian Cricket Board caved in and gave Packer the rights he wanted.

The involvement of Tony Greig, England's captain and established all-rounder, in Packer's venture effectively opened up a spot in the England setup for Botham. Greig, along with Australia's Ian Chappell, played a key role in recruiting players for Packer, something for which he was never forgiven by the Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB). He was immediately stripped of the

Copyrighted Material

England captaincy, and although he maintained his place in the team in the short term, by the end of the home Ashes series of 1977 he had played his last Test.

Greig was only thirty at the time, so it's likely that, but for his involvement with Packer, he would have played on for another five years or so. In the two Tests he played with Botham, in the summer of 1977, Greig was the all-rounder, batting at number five, the younger man a strike bowler, batting at number eight. It's not unreasonable to assume that had they continued to play together those roles would have been maintained. Thus, for the first few years of his England career at least, Botham would have been known as a bowler who could bat a bit, not a swashbuckling all-rounder knocking opposing bowlers around the field for fun. It's unlikely he would have established himself as a mainstay of the England team as soon as he did and in the manner he did.

Botham also benefited off the field from Packer's revolutionary mixture of private capital and televised spectacle. By 1976, the TCCB had begun looking for sponsors for Test match cricket. However, because of what *The Times* cricket correspondent John Woodcock suggested was a 'need, universally accepted, to prevent Mr Packer from continuing to filch the game's best players',[3] this became an imperative when the Australian launched his assault on the game. A deal with Cornhill Insurance worth £1 million over five years was quickly agreed. Botham, like other players, reaped the financial rewards. During the 1977 Ashes series, the Test fee for England players increased from £210 to £350, with a £100 bonus for matches won. By 1978 the fee had risen again to £1,000. By 1983 it was £1,500 and by the end of the decade it was £2,400. Fees for touring were also increased in 1977, from £3,000 to £5,000, with option contracts introduced for players willing to make themselves available for future England tours, and thus unavailable for Packer.[4]

Copyrighted Material

The partnership with Cornhill was an acceleration of a commercialisation process which had begun in the 1960s. Despite an image of men in blazers drawn largely from public school, Oxbridge backgrounds, cricket's administrators proved surprisingly receptive to television. The game had long been underpinned by an amateur ethos and a split between 'gentlemen' (who played for fun) and 'players' (who played for a living). The first professional captain of the England team, Len Hutton, was only appointed in 1952. It was another ten years before the practice of differentiating the status of players on scorecards by placing an amateur's initials before their surname and a professional's initials after was discontinued. Yet as crowds at County Championship games dwindled in the 1960s, those running the game used their links with the men in blazers at the BBC to promote the sport. Understanding the need for cricket to be packaged for television, they dropped their resistance to the one-day form of the game. They also embraced sponsorship and a more commercial future in the shape of first the Gillette Cup and then the John Player League. By the 1980s, therefore, thanks to the coverage of home Test series and the one-day competitions for county sides, cricket was regularly receiving more TV coverage than any other ball sport. Only snooker came close. The stage was set. There was a willing audience. It was just the right time for Botham to take on the role of leading man.

III

Although he made his debut in 1977, Botham didn't secure a regular place in the team until the following year, after which he enjoyed a scintillating run of form with Mike Brearley as his captain. Despite question marks over his batting, Brearley, who went on to have

Copyrighted Material

a post-cricket career as a psychoanalyst, was recognised as an outstanding leader. According to Australia's Rodney Hogg, he had 'a degree in people'[5] and he understood how to get the best out of England's new young star. Between June 1978 and February 1980, Botham, marshalled by Brearley, played twenty Tests across six series, scored 1,099 runs and took 112 wickets. England won twelve of the matches, losing just four. They also won five of the six series they played. Botham was instrumental throughout. When in early 1980 Brearley declined to tour again (he offered to captain England in home Tests if and when required) a heated debate ensued about who his replacement should be. Geoff Boycott was perhaps the obvious choice having stood in for Brearley on occasion. But Boycott was a divisive figure and, at thirty-nine, his best years were behind him. The rest of the contenders could be split into two groups: those who had strong captaincy credentials but little Test-playing experience, and those who were Test regulars but had little or no experience leading a team. Botham fell into the latter category but, because of his dominance with bat and ball, and thanks to a recommendation from Brearley, he got the nod.

It proved to be a disastrous decision. In his last appearance for England before he was made captain, the Golden Jubilee Test against India in Mumbai in February 1980, Botham became the first player ever to take ten wickets and score 100 in a Test match. Once he had the added responsibility of leading the team, however, his form collapsed. In twelve Tests he averaged thirteen with the bat and thirty-three with the ball. England too looked a shadow of the team that Brearley had led. Botham's first ten games in charge, six of which were at home, produced no victories and three defeats. As the 1981 home Ashes series loomed, his captaincy became the subject of national debate. The first Test did little to improve matters, Australia winning a low-scoring game thanks largely to England's poor fielding. Bad weather

Copyrighted Material

played its part in the second Test at Lord's, which ended in a draw. *Wisden* described it as a 'morbid' affair,[6] and it was most notable for Botham recording the only pair of his Test career. As he walked back to the pavilion having recorded his second duck, he was met by silence from the members in the MCC enclosure. None met his eye. He had reached the point of no return as captain and resigned before his inevitable sacking. The selectors turned to Brearley in his stead. Former skipper Ray Illingworth wrote in the *Sunday Mirror* that Botham was 'overrated, overweight and overpaid. He should be dropped from the team.'[7] He was not the only one who thought this, but Brearley insisted that Botham retain his place.

Thus it was that England limped to Headingley, tucked away among the red-brick terraced houses on the outskirts of Leeds, for the third Test. Although there was no real hint during the first four days of what was to come, the pressure had clearly been lifted from Botham. Australia won the toss and elected to bat. They were cruising at 335-4 before Botham stepped up and took five wickets for thirty-five after tea on the second day. The tourists were still able to declare on 401-9, a total which looked even better after England collapsed to 174 all out on day three. Botham, slowly recovering his form, had top scored with fifty off fifty-four balls. Australia enforced the follow-on, but bad light meant only three more overs were possible, in which England lost Graham Gooch. As the crowd waited for a resumption that never came, the stadium's new electronic scoreboard outlined the enormity of England's task. Ladbrokes' odds for the match were flashed up. The hosts were 500/1 outsiders. They looked to have called it about right as England lost wickets with metronomic regularity the next day. Reduced to 135-7, Brearley's team were still ninety-two runs behind. Botham was joined to thirty-nine in eighty-seven uncharacteristically ponderous minutes when he was joined in the

Copyrighted Material