



PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

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FOOTBALLS IN THE SANDS OF TIME

I first became interested in English soccer when I learnt that Marcuse was playing for Manchester United — an interesting career move for a philosopher thought dead since 1979. The Elvis Conspiracy paled in comparison with this. And for all I knew, Althusser had signed with Arsenal, Foucault with Queen's Park Rangers and Chomsky with Oldham Athletic. Oldham could do with that sort of talent. But of course I was wrong; this bloke was just Mark Hughes, no relation, and there's little chance that we will ever see Deleuze or Guattari at Wembley.

Watching soccer on TV I decided I liked the sound of Sheffield Wednesday, so that's the team I follow. Their club symbol is a stylized owl, very similar to the Victorian Council of Adult Education's logo, and most of the time they play in North Melbourne's colors, broad blue and white stripes, which makes it easy for me to recognize them. Sometimes they wear a dashing yellow number with thin double black stripes. I haven't worked out yet why they do this. There's a lot about soccer I don't understand yet, but it's curiously pleasant to watch, and must surely be the purest form of football.

The purest form of *foopball* is Australian Rules Football. Despite anything you may read in dictionaries, *foopball* is the most common and therefore authentic pronunciation of the name of our historic and most honored ball game. Born and bred in Melbourne, I have sometimes been derided for my snooty pronunciation of the word as *football*, but my loyalty to the game has never been impeached. ('Impeached', you may say, is much too big a verb for such a little matter. Not so if you have regard to its origin, which is Latin and means 'caught by the foot'.)

I have heard it said that rugby is the game played in Heaven, a sentiment I find as theologically dubious as the game is boring. William Webb Ellis, who first picked up the ball and ran with it at Rugby in 1823, has a lot to answer for — and not least that ultimate travesty of football, the game they play in America. I am not biased about these things. Some of my best friends are rugby followers and Americans. My father played soccer. My own on-ground experience, and it was often literally that, was entirely in

Australian Rules and at times profoundly dubious theologically.

Cast your mind back, as best you can, to 1943. Young Bangsund is cornered in the schoolyard at Helen Street Primary by a bunch of good-natured fellow urchins who demand to know who he barracks for. 'Barrack? Wotcha mean?' 'Foopball! Who's barracks for?' Oh, football: I hadn't given any thought to following a football team. At age four and a bit, going to school was enough to occupy my terrified mind. 'Wotsa teams?' I asked. They rattled off the names of the Immortal Twelve, and I liked the sound of the name 'Essendon', so I said 'Essendon.' They beat me then, abused my person, and scorned and condemned me and my ancestors. How was I to know that Collingwood and Fitzroy were the only teams acceptable in Northcote? — apart from Northcote itself, which played in the Association, but to barrack only for a VFA team was also unacceptable.

Having chosen Essendon, I became a devoted Essendon supporter, and remain so to this day. Some time I should go and see them play, even though they're not the side they were in the great days of Dick Reynolds, Doug McClure, Percy Bushby and Bill Hutchinson, or even in more recent times when that goal-kicking machine John Coleman was at his peak. But I probably won't. I doubt that I will ever see Sheffield Wednesday play either, except on television. For many years I followed Essendon on the wireless. I have fond memories of Saturday afternoons in the back yard at Northcote, listening to the football. What did people do with their time before there was wireless?

My father and mother met in South Melbourne, and were naturally South Melbourne supporters. I knew about Cazaly before I went to school: 'Up there, Cazaly!' is what parents at the time tended to say to their infants instead of 'Up you come!' or the like, especially if they were South Melbourne supporters. If my father had not been in New Guinea I might well have become a South Melbourne supporter too, but before the war ended I was at school and barracking for Essendon. My father took me to the cricket at the MCG — I recall being at a testimonial match for Don Bradman — and to football matches at the Northcote

ground. At that time I think his friend Doug Nicholls was coaching Northcote. Doug had been a star player for Northcote and Fitzroy. Later he was just the caretaker or manager of the Northcote ground, and later still Governor of South Australia. My father and Doug were members of the Northcote Church of Christ, and Doug was a frequent visitor at our place. Doug had gone into the ministry, and founded the Aboriginal Mission in Fitzroy. I taught his daughter Pam in Sunday School. Not long after that I went into the ministry too, and at the theological college in Glen Iris I gained a new perspective on football.

When teams were selected at school, for sport or any kind of games, I was always the last to be chosen, if at all. School can be hell for fat kids. When required to run in athletics meetings and cross-country runs I performed creditably, in that I usually finished the course, even if I came last. I don't know why they were called 'cross-country' runs: the only country-like thing about our runs through the back streets of Northcote and East Brunswick was the occasional glimpse of Merri Creek. On Wednesday afternoons, compulsory sports time at Northcote High, I played tennis, after a fashion. I fell in with other sporting no-hopers who spent most of their tennis time talking about books and music. One of them was Graeme Murphy, a boy regarded with deep suspicion because he was known to be taking ballet lessons. It wasn't until 1980, when I was editing the second volume of Edward Pask's *Ballet in Australia* for Oxford, that I discovered I had not been at school with the great dancer and choreographer but another Graeme Murphy entirely. But I did have a truly famous teacher: my form-master in 1953 was Kevin 'Skeeter' Coghlan, star rover for Hawthorn, one of that club's great 'Mosquito Fleet'.

There weren't enough people at theological college to allow total discrimination against fat students. I was still last to be chosen when teams were selected, and not chosen at all when the college was playing against an outside team, but in inter-house competition between the imaginatively named Glens and Irises I found myself with all the sport I could handle. (I was a Glen, luckily. To be last among the Irises would have been too much humiliation.) My tennis didn't improve much: my friend Ken Hank, who was crippled, but otherwise physically fit and very strong, used to enjoy belting me off the court. I wasn't too bad at table tennis: no-one in college could return my grapevine-stepover backhand, but it was an ungainly shot and I lost a lot of balls with it. I found cricket insufferably boring. When fielding, I was invariably placed at very-deep way-long-off, which meant that I sat under a tree somewhere near the boundary, reading Thoreau or someone equally tangential to divinity, and when the ball came my way everyone would yell and I would try to stop it going into Gardiner Creek.

The college principal, Lyall Williams, had played for Camberwell and Hawthorn in his day, so football was very much on the college calendar. Among the

teams we played was the Melbourne Bible Institute, whose students regarded us as dangerous modernists, and who were so little committed to football that hardly any of them owned studded boots: most of them played in sandshoes. What they lacked in appropriate footwear they made up for with agility and zeal, and as often as not they beat us.

From time to time the Glens were required to play the Irises at football, and my position was pretty much the same as in cricket, except that we played on a proper ground, the Dawson Reserve in Burke Road. In football, no matter how hard your team tries to keep you out of the way, inevitably the ball will come near you at times. At one such time I found the ball in front of me and everyone behind me, and I dashed after it, and almost had it, when a team-mate behind me said 'Leave it!' so I left it, of course, and Charlie Dow, captain of the Irises, grabbed it and punted it down the ground, and I couldn't believe it. How could Charlie do a thing like that — pretend to be my team-mate, when he was on the other side? I found this very difficult to accept, morally and theologically, and I said as much to my captain — Phil Andrews, I think it was — but he didn't seem interested in discussing it just then.

It was time, I decided, to hang up my boots and return to civilian life.

Notes

This disquisition was first published, without notes, in my 'Threepenny Planet' column in the April issue of the *Society of Editors Newsletter*.

Marcuse... Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), Louis Althusser (1918–90), Michel Foucault (1926–84), Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), Gilles Deleuze (b. 1925), Felix Guattari, social philosophers. In recent years Deleuze and Guattari have rarely been mentioned separately. After I wrote that paragraph I bought a copy of the *Monty Python* scripts, in the fond belief that they would include the Philosophers' Football Match, but they don't. Where would I find that sketch, Marc Ortlieb? *Sheffield Wednesday* lost the FA Cup to Arsenal in a Final Replay on 20 May, Arsenal scoring the deciding goal in the last minute of time-on. Watching the two matches and background pieces I learnt a good deal about my team. The club was formed in 1867 by Sheffield shop assistants who had to work on Saturdays but could get together to play cricket on their afternoon off, which was Wednesday — so that's where the odd name comes from. The soccer team was formed about 1907. The club is heavily involved in Good Works, notably with children and owls. It runs an owl sanctuary, and I can report having seen (if only on TV) everyone's favorite Sheffield Wednesday bird, a handsome six-year-old barn owl named Benjy. I can also report, from watching *Pole to Pole*, that the excellent Michael Palin is a Sheffield Wednesday supporter.

The Immortal Twelve: Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Footscray, Geelong, Hawthorn, Melbourne,

North Melbourne, Richmond, St Kilda, South Melbourne. For about ninety years these were the teams of the Victorian Football League. About ten years ago South Melbourne was moved to Sydney and renamed the Sydney Swans. In 1990 the VFL was renamed the Australian Football League, and it now includes teams from Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.

VFA: Victorian Football Association, formed 1877. The League started in 1896 when eight teams left the VFA.

Up there, Cazaly! apparently dates from 1921. Roy Cazaly (1893–1963) was an outstanding exponent of the flying mark — grabbing the ball way above the heads of leaping opponents.

Graeme Murphy: On 11 May, resuming the search in the garage for my file of *Philosophical Gas* 1972–86, missing since mid-1987, I found four issues of *Ripples*, the annual magazine of Northcote High School. In the 1950 issue all the students are listed, and my dancing friend turns out to have been *Graham* Murphy. So much for memory. In the 1953 issue Max Foyster is noted as one of the 'Brainwaves' of Form 1A. J. M. Foyster and I have known for years that we must have been at school together; now we have proof.

Thoreau: Was it Keats or Chapman who once observed that there is more in Thoreau than in Ingres?

Notes: I have always been jealous of *Philosophical Gas*'s proud reputation as an *accurate* journal. It has never pretended to be scholarly. There's far too much stuff of that sort around as it is. Any notes I may write should be regarded as digressions too long to be sensibly accommodated in the text, or explanations of matters familiar to some readers but not to others. They are written on the assumption that the reader has sufficient memory of the text, which is usually not overlong, to understand what they refer to. I trust that this explanation is acceptable to Messrs Foyster and Speer and anyone else who is troubled by the absence of superscripts. It's too late to explain it to Bruce Gillespie, who inserted totally unauthorized superscripts in his *TMR* reprint of 'How I Became an Editor'.

Accuracy: From the Greek a *kuros*, 'not authority'. The fairly rare *acyrology* (incorrect use of language) comes from the same source, and is chiefly distinguished from *accuracy* by its being noted in dictionaries.

COMMENTS

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I hope all these 3penny planctoids portend a forthcoming Bang&Olufson stereophonic memoir, search for lost or wasted time, fan's notes or other lifeformat. Certainly bits of yr biog are seen in many and diverse places, each replication subtly mutated, rather like my own articles on sci&art that pop up in such odd ventures as *21C*, which probably as many as 21 readers actually C; but here I dither, when my purpose (other than to express admiration at yr detailed memory and the skill with which you evoke episodes lost, perhaps even well-lost, to my own disgruntled and old-timer's-diseased brain ... Bruce Gillespie's mystical experience in St Kilda, Vargo Staten

discomfited, all that) is to admit confusion and self-rebuke at failing to take up the keyboard in the past when I ought to have done to spare you the shame of once more in public pushing forward your crippled jest about poor old Marcuse's footy boots, a conceit which would work satisfactorily only if this defunct German-American philosopher's name were pronounced /Mark-hews/ but flops belly-up and pale about the gills when we sophisticates note that of course the chap himself and all his anti-repressively-desublimated acolytes pronounced it /Mar-koo-suh/. And don't try to squirm out of this unmasked solecism with easy jibes about the contradictions inherent within post-Hegelian dialectical analysis.

Skel

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I was particularly taken with 'Footballs in the Sands of Time'. How could I resist the intro, being a keen Manchester United fan? I am surprised though that you failed to note that there is in fact a 'Socrates' playing for the Brazilian national team these days. Still in an effort to help bolster your premise I checked the goalscorers in this week's 'Football Pink', but failed to find an 'I. Degger' on the scoresheet anywhere. Foucault though is a very common soccer playing name. I seem to recall, when Cas and I were attending Old Trafford on a regular basis, irrespective of who our opponents were that day there always seemed to be a 'Foucault' playing for them. Must be a large family. This guy though was invariably a late addition to the squad apparently, because he was never mentioned in the program. Gentlemen to a man though the United crowd would invariably take to him and try to cheer him up by chanting to him 'You're going to win Foucault.'

Oddly, both Cas and I support Sheffield Wednesday as our second team. We were both born in Yorkshire, so supporting a Lancashire team in Manchester United (despite Roses rivalry) means that for our own peace of mind we need to take some interest in a Yorkshire side lest we be deemed 'Vichy' by Free Yorkist Partisans everywhere.

The Mystery of the Change Strip can though be revealed. When Sheffield Wednesday are playing 'away' at the home of a team who normally play in blue (or white) they must change their strip, because no referee or linesman, given their average IQ of -17, could be expected to differentiate easily between a blue-and-white striped shirt and a solid blue or white shirt. Thus the tasteful black-and-yellow striped ensemble that makes things easier for referees but very confusing for wasps and hornets everywhere.

I trust this answers most of your questions. Others, such as 'Is there a God?' and 'Why a Mouse when it Spins?' are far too trivial and should be taken up with your local authorities.

I HAVE ALSO HEARD FROM

Leigh Edmonds, Walt Willis, Redd Boggs, Elizabeth Darling, Dave Piper and Bob Bloch since this journal of informed opinion and refined punctuation resumed regular publication. Bob fell and sprained his right hand during April. PG, he says, revived his 'pleasant memories of Oz', and he asks me to say hello to his old friends.

ENDT 31 May