

## **Herbert Chapman: Football Revolutionary?**

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In the twilight of an unexceptional footballing career, Herbert Chapman joined Northampton Town as player-manager in 1907. He led the Cobblers to the Southern League Championship in his second season before leaving for Leeds City in 1912. Two years after narrowly missing out on promotion in 1914, Chapman left Leeds to spend the second half of the Great War managing a munitions factory. However it was between the wars that Chapman really made his name; steering both Huddersfield Town and Arsenal to First Division Championship hat-tricks.

The methods which Chapman employed to achieve such success, have come under considerable scrutiny. When they were at the peak of their powers in the 1930s, Arsenal became known as the ‘Bank of England Club’ and were accused of buying success. Certainly there was good reason for this; Herbert Chapman’s successor at the club, George Allison, claimed that they paid a total of £101,400 in transfer fees over a period of eight seasons.<sup>1</sup> However, several historians have taken issue with the idea of success purchased, claiming, like Deryk Brown, that “buying players is one thing, motivating them into a successful team is another”.<sup>2</sup> In the thirties, Chelsea provided ample evidence of this: spending considerable sums of money, but failing to finish any higher than eighth in the League, at any stage. This appears to suggest that Herbert Chapman brought something else to Arsenal, and for that matter his other successful clubs, Northampton, Leeds and Huddersfield. This special ingredient was his tactical acumen.

Chapman introduced changes in the way his teams approached games. In a context in which most teams were still run by directors who had not played at the top level, Chapman sought to bring his own playing experience to bear on the game. Stephen Studd describes Chapman’s approach as:

a reaction to the days when teams took to the field without an overall plan of how they were to set about winning, when the only initiative that came from management was to encourage friendships in the team so that players were more ready to discuss tactics among themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that this had been the case, even during Chapman's managerial career. In 1914, John Lewis, an ex-referee commented that:

It is certainly true that our professionals evince no great anxiety to learn anything of the theory of the sport and that in most teams there is no evidence of pre-conceived tactics or thought-out manoeuvres.<sup>2</sup>

Chapman confirmed this belief, reminding his readers that in his playing days, "no attempt was made to organise victory. The most that I remember was the occasional chat between, say two men playing on the same wing."<sup>3</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to assert that tactical discussion did not occur. This is certainly not the case. Both before and after the First World War, the Newcastle full-backs, led by Billy McCracken, had infamously perfected the offside trap. However, tactical planning was not widespread, and when it did occur, it tended to exist only in pockets of play, such as the elaborate triangular passing routines at Tottenham Hotspur, rather than in the team as a whole. This did not satisfy Chapman.

Chapman felt that the whole team should come under the same tactical umbrella, and that the players should all be working, both practically and theoretically, towards the same goal. As he wrote in the thirties:

It is no longer necessary to play well. They [the team] must get the goals, no matter how, and the points. The measure of their skill is, in fact, judged by their position in the League table, and they have to bend all their efforts to ensure it is a good one.<sup>4</sup>

Though, as Bob Wall has pointed out, there was nothing particularly original about this philosophy,<sup>5</sup> what was remarkable was the way Chapman set about implementing it. As Phil Soar has explained "Chapman was one of the first managers to put into really good effect the very obvious truth that the best side is the one which scores most goals."<sup>6</sup> In the same

way that Chapman had professionalised the job of the football manager, he sought to professionalise the attitude to tactics: "It is just as important that we should prevent our opponents getting goals against us as endeavour to score them ourselves."<sup>7</sup> This was a policy that Chapman appeared to pursue throughout his managerial career, most notably in 1925, when Huddersfield became the first team to go through an entire season in the First Division without conceding more than two goals in any one game. Chapman, realising that by definition, defence and attack should be equally important, asked questions of understood tactical norms. "I am beginning to wonder if adequate credit is given to defence",<sup>8</sup> he explained, and it is in this area that Chapman's role in the evolution of football tactics has come under the most scrutiny.

In 1925 the offside law was changed. Before that date, a player was offside if, at the moment the ball was played towards him, he did not have at least three opponents between himself and the opposing goal. In 1925 the number was reduced to two. The new law was introduced in response to a goal shortage, and in the short-term it served its purpose, raising the goal count by 50 per cent, or the equivalent of one extra goal per game.<sup>9</sup> However, in the long-term the goal count fell again and Willy Meisl believes that this was largely the result of a major tactical change brought about by Herbert Chapman. "The new offside rule made the centre-forward a terrifying spearhead of any attack. So Chapman made the centre-half into a sheath which rendered this spearhead harmless."<sup>10</sup> In the long term, the traditional 2-3-5 formation was altered so that the centre-half dropped back from the half-back line into the centre of defence, to become a third-back. The change quickly became almost universal, and consequently there is much debate about who was responsible for the innovation of the defensive centre-half, or 'stopper'.

Arsenal folklore has it that the 'stopper' was invented by Herbert Chapman and inside-right, Charles Buchan, in response to a 7-0 defeat at Newcastle in October 1925, but there have been many competing claims. Charlie Spencer, for example, insisted that he had performed this defensive role for Newcastle that very day.<sup>11</sup> Bob Gillespie at Queen's Park is said to have made it his job to blot out the opposing centre-forward,<sup>12</sup> and Jimmy Seed claims that in the opening game of the 1925/26 season his Tottenham teammate, Charlie Walters, performed this role against Arsenal.<sup>13</sup>

It has also been asserted by authors such as Deryk Brown that there were defensive centre-halves before the change in the offside law.<sup>14</sup> Buchan himself, agrees, citing players such as Charlie Thompson (Sunderland), Joe McCall (Preston North End) and Charlie Roberts (Manchester United) as stoppers, long before 1925.<sup>15</sup> Curiously, it is even claimed that in the 1922 FA Cup Final, Tom Wilson, representing Chapman's Huddersfield Town, played the part of the third defender, between the full-backs. *The Examiner* described his role as that of the 'great spoiler'.<sup>16</sup>

Given the number of different accounts, and the questionable nature of so many, it would be difficult to prove who invented the defensive centre-half. However, there is enough evidence at least to question whether the pioneer was either Chapman on his own or in partnership. It also appears that the position existed before 1925, and that the change in the offside law was not its cause, rather it had made the need for a stopper more acute. It is in the refining of the position that Chapman proved so influential. As is often pointed out until 1925 "the centre-half was still an attacker",<sup>17</sup> that is to say, he still had attacking duties, and it is in this respect that Arsenal's 'stopper' came to differ so drastically from so many others. Between Charles Buchan and Herbert Chapman it was decided that Jack Butler (Arsenal's centre-half) would adopt a purely defensive position. Meanwhile other teams had centre-halves with defensive duties, or preferred ones that exhibited good defensive qualities. Here lay the subtle, but crucial difference, one that Buchan hinted at, in his book *A Lifetime in Football*.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that a distinction did exist between Arsenal's method and that of other clubs, is perhaps borne out by Arsenal's eventual league position at the end of the 1925/6 season. They finished second, when they had been 20th the season before, and had only bought one new outfield player. This was Buchan and though he was an exceptional player, I would argue that it was Chapman's tactical abilities, which were mainly responsible for the improvement. In December 1925 the *Daily Express* attempted to account for the dramatic change in the club's fortunes and concluded that "the real man behind the gun is Herbert Chapman, the manager. It is due to him, more than anyone else, that such a transformation has taken place."<sup>19</sup>

Still, Chapman was not entirely satisfied with the system, as Butler

occasionally reverted back to his old position during matches. So in 1926, Chapman brought in Herbie Roberts, and began to mould him into what became the archetypal stopper. His abilities reflected this new role. Technically, he was not as good a player as Butler, but he was extremely disciplined and as Cliff Bastin has suggested, “was a terrific tackler and was practically unbeatable in the air.”<sup>20</sup> Because he had no attacking duties, Roberts’ new role masked his failings, such as a widely reputed lack of kicking power.

The refinement of the role of the ‘stopper’ was not Chapman’s only tactical innovation. Bernard Joy has claimed that “he changed the function of every position vitally, except that of goalkeeper.”<sup>21</sup> With the probable exception of the centre-forward and inside-right, a good case can be made for this assertion. In defence, Chapman did more than simply introduce a new defender; the whole nature of the system was altered. Due to the presence of a central ‘third defender’, the two full-backs were pushed out towards the touch-line to mind the opposing wingers.

The extent of the defensive shake-up was reflected by Chapman’s desire to obtain players to fit the new positions who were well disposed to accepting new ideas. None of Chapman’s long-term defenders at Arsenal had played under the old system. In the case of Herbie Roberts, he was a young wing-half, and could be taught the new centre-half position without the preconceived ideas about the role that, for example, Jack Butler had had. Eddie Hapgood lends weight to this view, later writing that, “not until Herbie took over from Butler, did the ‘Chapman third-back game’ really get under way.”<sup>22</sup> Hapgood himself joined Arsenal in 1927, when he was only 19 years old, an ideal age to be indoctrinated into the new left full-back role. Youth was also on the side of George Male, who was successfully converted from a half-back into a right full-back. His predecessor, Tom Parker, had also adapted well to the role, perhaps because of his own celebrated tactical brain and positional sense.

It has been demonstrated that the Arsenal defence had been modified into a third-back line to cope with the threat of the opposing centre-forward and wingers. However, Chapman’s defensive planning would appear to encompass more than just delegating strict defensive duties to the three ‘backs’ and it reflected a tactical change identified in the *Topical Times* from 1925:

The inside wing-men no longer play the part in football that they used to play. Instead of going up to do their one-time share in the attack, they are almost without exception inclined to hang back so that, in the first place they are able to fill the gap which is now left by the centre-half becoming a sort of third full-back, and in the second place they are the men who feed the other forwards.<sup>23</sup>

The old five-in-a-line attack was evolving into what became identified as the  $\nabla$  formation.<sup>24</sup> Chapman's answer to this, it seems, was to develop something of a defensive  $\wedge$  to protect the Arsenal goal, with the two Arsenal wing-halves taking responsibility for the opposing inside forwards. The result was a loose man-for-man system.

Infact, the system was an elaborate combination of man-marking and zonal defending, but essentially it seems that Chapman was trying to account for the actions of opposing attackers and delegate specific defensive duties to his five 'backs'. It would be difficult to prove that this was the first determined effort to implement such a policy and Chapman never claimed originality. However, several factors must be borne in mind when evaluating the evidence. Crucially, Chapman died early in 1934, when Arsenal were enjoying incredible success - and it is possible that Chapman did not wish to share this tactic with the world at a time when it was proving so fruitful, so he did not draw attention to it. (Significantly Arsenal were enjoying their best defensive record under Chapman in the year of his death).<sup>25</sup> Had Chapman survived into a period when the tactic became more commonplace, he may have shed some light on its origins. This theory is given credence by a conversation Chapman had with Hugo Meisl (Chairman of the progressive Austrian F.A.). When criticised about Arsenal's defensive game, Chapman responded; "Look Hugo. It works. I am just waiting until everybody has copied it, then I shall come up with something new."<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, Chapman was a notoriously duplicitous character. It was said of his transfer dealings that he always bought the man that a team did not want to sell.<sup>27</sup> This is abundantly clear to anyone who takes the time to examine the circumstances surrounding the signings of Alex Jackson, Ted Taylor and David Jack, amongst others. When he changed Arsenal's socks from red and white to blue and white hoops, Chapman justified his decision by

claiming that red ran in the wash. However, subsequently it has been revealed that the change allowed Arsenal players to instantly recognise their colleagues, in a melee, without having to look up.<sup>28</sup>

Writing in the *Sunday Express* Chapman claimed that in football, there were four key men - the two wing-halves and the inside-forwards.<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere, he explained that “if I’ve got a good goalkeeper and a good stopper centre-half, all I need is the two best wingers and the best centre-forward there is. It doesn’t matter what the rest are like.”<sup>30</sup> Given these totally conflicting accounts, and the fact that typically Arsenal fielded almost an entire team of internationals, it would appear that Chapman was not above the occasional act of deception.

Chapman also had additional considerations, which may help explain why he did not disclose more details of his defensive system. As he was only too aware, he was very much in the public eye, and therefore was always trying to play down the organised, tactical side of the Arsenal game. This was because in the inter-war period, it was considered something of a constraining influence over the players, and Chapman had no wish to portray Arsenal as boring, for it may have adversely affected the club’s attendances.

Though there is little secondary evidence to suggest that Arsenal played to an accountable man-for-man defensive plan, contemporary sources seem to back the assertion. After the 1930 F.A. Cup Final, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote that “The Arsenal half-backs...were all for making defence their first, almost their only, duty.”<sup>31</sup> Several other newspapers, including *The Times*<sup>32</sup> and the *Evening Standard*<sup>33</sup> picked this up, and the testimony of Cliff Bastin provides a good indication of the intricate mixture of marking, covering and shepherding, that Arsenal employed. Bastin explained that half-back Charlie Jones advocated man-for-man marking, and although it was not adopted in its entirety, because it would have disrupted the complicated covering system, he claimed that “up to a point Arsenal always played this.”<sup>34</sup>

However, Arsenal’s system certainly was not man-for-man marking because, as Bernard Joy has explained, Roberts’ role was not to shadow the striker everywhere; rather, it was a zonal detail. Roberts would not be

drawn wide, but would protect the area in front of goal, as this was where 90 percent of goals were being scored.<sup>35</sup> Instead Chapman devised a complicated system of defending called the diagonal system or double cover method, whereby the Arsenal full-backs would pivot on the centre-half and come into the centre to meet crosses from the opposite wing, thus giving double the protection in the penalty area.

This was part of Chapman's plan to create a cast-iron retreating defence, that when under attack, would funnel back to the penalty area, but "once the 18-yard line was reached the 'They should not pass' notice went up and Arsenal refused to yield an inch."<sup>36</sup> The Arsenal defence, in their third of the field, would compress space and not commit players or leave gaps, but would offer only the option of going down the wings, because, as Chapman explains:

I was told not long ago of a manager who had instructed his wing men that they should aim to get within six yards of the corner flag before crossing. That, I may say, is where we like them to go, because it means that they are wasting time and allowing our defenders to get back and take up correct positions to deal with the centres.<sup>37</sup>

This was something of a revolutionary view to take at the time, and explained why so many teams felt they had been robbed when they played the Arsenal. They might press forward earnestly for the majority of the game and have nothing to show for it simply because they were easily frustrated by an Arsenal defence well equipped to prevent attacks from the flanks. The fact that so many opponents did not come to terms with this, is illustrated by *The Times* report of the 1930 FA Cup Final between Arsenal and Huddersfield. "If some of the strength of the side [Huddersfield] on the wings could have been transferred to the centre, things might have gone differently."<sup>38</sup>

Chapman also had an ulterior motive for creating a strong defence that readily conceded ground. It sprang from a theory that he had formed after his Northampton team was defeated by Norwich in 1907, despite having dominated the game. According to Stephen Studd, this match confirmed his belief that "a team can attack for too long."<sup>39</sup> The progression of this theory, was that Herbert Chapman based his tactics upon the apparent

contradiction that, 'defence is the best form of attack',<sup>40</sup> thus turning contemporary thinking on its head. Chapman's reasoning was that "the most opportune time for scoring is immediately after repelling an attack, because opponents are then strung out in the wrong half of the field."<sup>41</sup> Sir Matt Busby has illustrated both the revolutionary nature and the effectiveness of such a policy, "The number of goals created from rearguard beginnings...was the most significant factor in Arsenal's greatness."<sup>42</sup>

Chapman combined his counter-attacking theory with another: "You have to have the ball to attack, so what is wrong with coming back to retrieve it?"<sup>43</sup> The result, according to John Harding, was a system that "was far ahead of its time in organisation and co-operation... the whole system designed to lure the opposition further and deeper"<sup>44</sup> into the Arsenal half. Then, as Stephen Studd explains, when they had seen off an advance on their goal, they

turned defence into attack in a matter of seconds, the whole team acting as a single, organic unit with a thrilling and devastating efficiency. Nothing quite like it had ever been seen before. The style was a culmination of Chapman's theory and practice during 20 years in football management... demanding a carefully planned, scientific method of winning matches.<sup>45</sup>

Chapman's methods were based on thinking about the game. The club's trainer, Tom Whittaker described him as a '25 hour a day manager'<sup>46</sup> and Eddie Hapgood explained that Chapman "loved to sit up to the early hours with Whittaker...arguing tactics, angles, theories."<sup>47</sup> Although they were being labelled 'Lucky Arsenal', the fact that their style of play helped them to score so many goals (a record 127 in 1930-31), proves that their success was no accident.

As the vast majority of opposition attacks were being cut out by Herbie Roberts, Chapman devised a way of exploiting his clearances to the best attacking advantage. The solution was the role devised for Alex James. Cliff Bastin explained that James would pick up ball after ball from Roberts in midfield,<sup>48</sup> and his role was designed to serve this purpose. Ostensibly an inside-left, Alex James was in fact so withdrawn that generally, he was playing in the area associated with the traditional centre-half. This is not to undermine James' contribution; he is often described as

the hub of the side and the link between the defence and the attack, and for this reason John Harding has concluded that:

Of all the changes, the most 'revolutionary' was that which involved Alex James: free to roam wherever he liked, performing a role rather than holding a position, he was the first truly 'modern' player.<sup>49</sup>

The significance of James' game had not gone unnoticed by his contemporaries, as Matt Busby has illustrated: "They talk today about middlemen as though they were a modern invention. In the magnificent Arsenal team of the thirties James was the great creator from the middle."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps due to the revolutionary nature of his role, there has been much debate about its origins. The traditional view is that Herbert Chapman devised it, but John Harding has taken issue with this, claiming that "the idea that Chapman somehow 'moulded' James into some preconceived 'roving commissioner' must be seen as wide of the mark."<sup>51</sup>

However the facts would appear to somewhat contradict Harding's interpretation of events. For example, at Arsenal, James' goal tally fell to less than a third of what it had been at Preston North End.<sup>52</sup> There is also considerable evidence to suggest that Chapman had a history of using players in a roving commission, perhaps most famously, Clem Stephenson at Huddersfield.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, Chapman was under no illusion as to how vastly the role would differ from that of the traditional inside-forward. When Charles Buchan had suggested the third-back game to Chapman, some four years prior to James' arrival, they both agreed upon the need for one of the inside-forwards to drop back and fill the gap left by the centre-half. Buchan strongly recommended that he should perform the role, but Chapman - aware of the implications of having Buchan operating that deep - overruled him, claiming that his goals were too important to the side. Instead Chapman selected a reserve, Andy Neil, who Buchan described as 'slow as a post'<sup>54</sup>, but who had excellent ball control and quick, accurate distribution. Thus, although Neil was a poor candidate for an inside-forward position, he was ideal for the deeper role.

It would be unfair to suggest that Alex James did not himself contribute to the evolution and enhancement of the new position. However, it would

also be wrong to underestimate Herbert Chapman's considerable part in conceiving the role. Undoubtedly James was intrinsically involved in making the Arsenal system work. He was an intelligent player, and as such was a typical member of Chapman's teams.

Herbert Chapman surrounded himself with intelligent footballers, such as James, David Jack, and Buchan. Charles Buchan believed that the secret of Chapman's greatness was that he "would always listen to other people and take advantage of their ideas if he thought they would improve the team in any way."<sup>55</sup> Chapman institutionalised his belief in shared discussion by setting up scheduled meetings for the Arsenal players at midday every Friday, when the team would discuss both the previous and the upcoming match. Chapman even had a magnetic model football pitch on a table so that he could show players exactly what he wanted them to do. In addition, players could show him their ideas and, as Tony Pawson has explained, "even players too reticent to put their ideas into words could express them."<sup>56</sup> As a result players would become fully aware of their part in the overall tactical plan. Chapman himself explained that previously some players would just nod, say 'yes', then not follow his orders<sup>57</sup>.

The player meetings were exclusive to Arsenal, and they illustrated the level of dedication that Chapman demanded from his players. He insisted that they study the game even when they were not in the team, as he felt they could learn just as much this way. It is likely that such manager-player co-operation was responsible for some of Arsenal's tactical innovations. Frank Grande credits Chapman with the invention of set-pieces,<sup>58</sup> and though this may be the case, it is more likely that they originated from the players. Arsenal's inside-right, David Jack, advocated swapping Herbie Roberts for a less effective header of the ball when Arsenal won corners, because with his aerial prowess he was likely to score goals.<sup>59</sup> Phil Soar describes just such a goal from Roberts' in the sixth round of the FA Cup in 1932, as "obviously pre-planned."<sup>60</sup> In December 1930, Arsenal beat Blackpool 7-1, and four of the goals are reported to have come from corners.<sup>61</sup>

Set-pieces were only a small feature of Arsenal's game. A far more visible change had been in evidence since Chapman's days at Northampton. This was his method of bringing wingers into play more effectively. To achieve

this Chapman employed his preferred tactic of passing inside the full-back. This frontal assault on goal, he explained, was a “more deadly, if less spectacular method than the senseless policy of running along the lines and centring just in front of the goalmouth, where the odds are nine to one on the defenders.”<sup>62</sup> Such crusades against wasteful play were a key part of what Studd describes as Chapman’s endeavour to “put the game on a more efficient footing.”<sup>63</sup>

Passing inside the opposing full-back was all part of a wider policy. Bernard Joy said that “Arsenal deliberately directed the mechanism of the whole team to exploit the thrustful side of their wingers’ play.”<sup>64</sup> Chapman drastically altered their role, as he felt that they

must break away from the old idea that their place is on the line. They should always be ready to move inside, not only when they have the ball themselves, but whenever there is a likelihood of it coming over from the opposite wing.<sup>65</sup>

This was to compensate for the loss of firepower resulting from the more withdrawn roles played by the inside-forwards. The extent of this change in the role of the wingers was perhaps best illustrated in the 1932-33 season, when Hulme and Bastin scored almost half of the team’s total goals, with Bastin setting a record for a winger of 33 in one season.<sup>66</sup>

The archetypal Arsenal goal, as illustrated by Bernard Joy, stemmed from a Roberts clearance to James, who would then hit a long low pass inside the full-back for Joe Hulme to cross at speed into the centre for the onrushing Bastin (or centre-forward Jack Lambert) to rifle home.<sup>67</sup> Time was of the essence in this new system, because Chapman believed that “the quicker you get to your opponent’s goal, the less obstacles you find.”<sup>68</sup> As a result it is estimated that the whole move, from clearance to goal, would take only eight or nine seconds.<sup>69</sup>

Chapman’s penchant for tactical planning and ability to transfer his designs onto the pitch led to his teams earning the label ‘machine’. This was heard first in 1910, at Northampton<sup>70</sup> and it was often repeated through the Arsenal years, where as Harding describes it “though the faces changed, the machine rolled on smoothly, sometimes more efficiently.”<sup>71</sup> This tag also reflected Bernard Joy’s belief that “team work was the basis

of the team's success",<sup>72</sup> and Chapman demanded total commitment from all his players - including the unprecedented step of giving defensive duties to his inside forwards and wingers.<sup>73</sup>

However, the tactical alterations were only half the story. As Alex James has pointed out, "don't run away with the idea that we won the games by planning out the tactics beforehand."<sup>74</sup> This is not to belittle the role that the tactics played in Arsenal's success, but more to illustrate that the system only worked because Arsenal had the players to make it. In dismissing accusations that Arsenal were too regimented, Chapman echoed James' view, explaining that "all the men are expected to play to plan, but not so as to stifle individuality."<sup>75</sup>

The fact that those teams who, in the words of Willy Meisl, blindly aped Herbert Chapman's methods,<sup>76</sup> by and large failed to recreate Arsenal's success, proves that the players made the system work. The best example of this was Alex James, whose incredible talent is perhaps the best documented of all the Arsenal players. Matt Busby has explained how his dribbling skills would leave numerous opponents trailing in his wake as he set off up-field or hit accurate long range passes often still facing his own goal.<sup>77</sup> George Allison described him as the most naturally gifted player he had ever seen and spoke of his great football brain.<sup>78</sup> He is usually quoted as one of the top ten greatest ever British players,<sup>79</sup> and Peter Morris described him as "the greatest midfield general the game has ever known."<sup>80</sup> More pointedly, Deryk Brown doubts that Arsenal could have won their trophies without him.<sup>81</sup> Revealingly enough, Arsenal had not won anything until James arrived.

It has been said that the reason why those teams classed as Arsenal 'copyists' failed, was because they did not recognise the role that James played at Arsenal. However, even if they had picked up the subtleties of his contribution, they would have struggled to emulate it, because he was a far better player than most could hope to be. This was true of the majority of Chapman's Arsenal team that boasted a host of internationals: Frank Moss, George Male, Eddie Hapgood, Herbie Roberts, Joe Hulme, David Jack, Cliff Bastin, Jack Butler, Alf Baker, Alex James, Bill Harper, Bob John, Charlie Jones and Dan Lewis.

In trying to account for Chapman's success, John Harding concludes that he "created a system and fitted it to match and enhance the skills of the men he had on hand, not vice versa."<sup>82</sup> Certainly there is evidence to support this assertion; Chapman himself always maintained that "the Arsenal have fitted their game to the players"<sup>83</sup>, but this does not tell the whole story. As I explained earlier, through his regular *Sunday Express* articles and radio broadcasts<sup>84</sup>, Chapman was very much in the media spotlight, and he was aware that any adverse publicity (in this case, revelations that Arsenal's players curbed some of their natural instincts for the good of the team) might affect Arsenal's gates. Consequently, the quotation from Chapman needs to be seen in this context, and it is only partially true. Rather Chapman acquired players that he felt could operate in the system he had created. The playing staff reflected this, (only Alf Baker and Bob John remained as regulars from the pre-Chapman era) as did the scoring record of the full and half-backs (out of 127 goals in the 1930-31 season, they managed only four). The fact that it took Alex James a year and a spell in the Arsenal reserves to be converted from a goal scorer to a goal maker<sup>85</sup>, is also strong evidence to suggest that the players were fitted to the system.

This does Chapman an injustice, however, because a key part of his tactical nuance was the organic and pragmatic marriage of his theories to the individual abilities of the players. This could best be seen in the play of Arsenal outside-left Cliff Bastin. He had previously been an inside-forward, and because of Alex James' deeper role, Bastin was able to come inside, to his old position, and score a considerable number of goals. Chapman devised a combination of fitting both system to player and vice-versa, by "choosing and moulding as part of a whole - not just allowing them to function as individuals in the well defined grooves laid down when 'positional' play was strict."<sup>86</sup> Instead, as Joy has shown, fluidity of positional play was emphasised, especially among the attacking players.<sup>87</sup> Because of this flexible approach, the players were able to perform more effectively, as their roles suited their abilities.

The system worked so well that Arsenal were able to win games even when they did not play at their best. This happened regularly over the years, for example, in 1932, the *Sunday Times* reported that: "The Prince of Wales did not see the Arsenal play anything like the snappy football of which they

are capable, but he saw them beat Chelsea easily enough by 4-1 yesterday at Highbury.”<sup>88</sup> It was results such as this, in tandem with Chapman’s counter-attacking tactics that earned the team the tag ‘Lucky Arsenal’. Tom Whittaker has pointed out the curious irony in this, as “Arsenal were the club that left nothing to chance.”<sup>89</sup>

In the final analysis, it was Herbert Chapman’s boundless desire for progress that hallmarked his contribution to the development of English football. He would seemingly utilise any method, regardless of its origin, to effect the betterment of his teams. He experimented, but he did not do so blindly, for he possessed the vision and adaptability to incorporate innovations into his grand designs. History has employed many a superlative in the attempt to explain the central role of Herbert Chapman in the changes to the English game, and doubtless his significance will continue to provoke discussion. Unhappily, however, his influence is perhaps best illustrated by the events which followed his death. Nobody really took up Chapman’s mantle - and English football stagnated as a result. Whilst the nation complained that the stopper had a negative impact upon the game, the Hungarians re-invented the role to momentous effect.

It is not inconceivable that Chapman would have been moving in a similar direction had he lived on. Firstly, he had always sought to keep abreast of tactical innovation, and there is no reason to assume he would have ceased doing so. Secondly, he kept a close eye on developments in the European game, and was a close friend of Hugo Meisl, Chairman of the Austrian FA. Throughout his managerial career, Chapman had always borrowed ideas if he considered them worthy and Europe was no exception. His conviction that “there is a great future for football by artificial light in England”<sup>90</sup> was cemented after seeing floodlit matches in Belgium and Holland in 1930. Chapman had always backed his belief in the importance of learning from the continentals with actions. As early as 1909, he took his Northampton team to Germany to play Nuremberg FC and in April 1921 his Huddersfield side overcame the French Champions, Red Star, 2-0 in Paris. Chapman carried these excursions right through to his Arsenal days, but he believed that they were only a prelude to a Western European Cup involving the Champions of nations such as France, Spain, Germany, Scotland and England.<sup>91</sup>

Chapman saw such developments as crucial to the long-term success of English football, and he cared passionately about his nation's game. In fact, in 1933, despite objections from selectors, he acted as unofficial manager to the England team in Italy and Switzerland with considerable success. His tactical pre-match team talks helped effect a 4-0 victory over a strong Swiss team, and a 1-1 draw against Italy, in Rome.<sup>92</sup> A year later the Italians were World Champions and seven Arsenal players were in the England team that proved what England could achieve, defeating the visitors 3-2 in 'the Battle of Highbury'. Chapman's teams enjoyed considerable success against continental opposition.

The English game was at a crossroads when Chapman died. Despite its status as one of the most advanced footballing nations, other countries were catching and surpassing it in many areas. Though there were other progressive figures in the game, such as 'Major' Frank Buckley at Wolves and Jimmy Seed at Charlton, none of their voices carried half the weight that Chapman's did. He had recognised the need for drastic change, and saw the way forward in the efficient running of the Italian and Austrian sides. But the English FA's refusal to learn from these examples and stubborn insistence upon choosing the national side with a selection committee, were typical of its unenlightened nature. Nearly a quarter of a century before they were humbled by the Hungarians at Wembley in 1953, Chapman had predicted a downturn in England's fortunes if they continued to ignore the advances being made in the European game.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps it could be said that English football is still paying the price for not acting on his warning.

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