

 GOLDEN HILL SPORTS BOOK OF THE YEAR 2005

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My Father AND OTHER



Working-Class Football Heroes

GARY IMLACH

'The most emotionally charged and moving
sports book I think I've ever read' DAILY MAIL

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WINNER OF THE WILLIAM HILL SPORTS BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

A poignant and moving account of the author's search for the man his father was and the life he led as a well-known footballer, blending the personal and the historical into an unforgettable story

Stewart Imlach was an ordinary neighbourhood soccer star of his time.

A brilliant winger who thrilled the crowd on Saturdays, then worked alongside them in the off-season; who represented Scotland in the 1958 World Cup and never received a cap for his efforts; who was Man of the Match for Nottingham Forest in the 1959 FA Cup Final, and was rewarded with the standard offer - £20 a week, take it or leave it.

Gary Imlach grew up a privileged insider at Goodison Park when Stewart moved into coaching. He knew the highlights of his father's career by heart. But when his dad died he realised they were all he knew. He began to realise, too, that he'd lost the passion for football that his father had passed down to him. In this book he faces his growing alienation from the game he was born into, as he revisits key periods in his father's career to build up a picture of his football life - and through him a whole era.

'The most emotionally charged and moving sports book I've ever read' *Daily Mail*

My Father And Other Working Class Football Heroes Details

Date : Published August 3rd 2006 by Yellow Jersey (first published 2005)

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Author : Gary Imlach

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From Reader Review My Father And Other Working Class Football Heroes for online ebook

Keith Salmon says

This is an excellent book and it is a little unfair to pigeon hole it as many do. This book is about a man finding his father when its too late. If we are honest we are all a little bit like Gary Imlach, we wished we had been a bit more interested in our fathers life, for many it is too late and you find the love when its too late. A really touching interesting book on a number of levels, the story of a journeyman footballer, a unsung local hero, but a husband and a father.

Gary does his dad proud.

David says

The story of his fathers football career in the 1950's. It is hard to believe how different it was back then. The statistical stuff you could find anywhere, but this book is at its best when comparing the life of a footballer in those days, to the riches that top players earn today. Fascinating insights about the maximum wage for a player being only £15 a week, when some of the bigger factories were paying their workers £11. To get around this, most big clubs (in this case Nottingham Forest. Would purchase houses so that players could live rent free, and also offer modest travelling expenses as another perk.

Andrew says

I must declare a personal connection with this book,if a very tentative one.I had the pleasure of knowing the Imlach family while Stewart was playing for Crystal Palace and living in Addiscombe in Croydon in the mid-60s.I was friends with Gary's older brother Stephen and thus knew the authour as a small boy...8 or 9..and his even younger brother,Michael.I often played with them,& occasionally met father Stewart,a quiet,unassuming man with a ready smile & a kind word for a slightly stage-struck 10-year-old.The Palace team which had recently won promotion to Division 2 was full of characters,& their manager,Dick Graham,was a one-off. I still remember the terrible tackle which mangled his knee; this was the era of the 'uncompromising' bully-boy defenders,who would today,have had no careers,but in those days of the 1960s put an end to many careers!

Many of Gary's reminiscences of this time were naturally vague but I found his investigation into his father's career very moving and an eye-opener too.How far professional footballers have come in the forty years since Stewart hung-up his boots.

Gary's book deserves a wide readership as it tells some essential truths about relationships between fathers and sons, about football in a wider context than results and championships and cups, and about our debts of honour to our parents who often shield us from the cold realities of life. Recommended to students of football and working-class lives.

James says

Rarely does a book capture that fine balance of a personal account without the author *being* the story, but this was one of those. This was a study of footballers in the fifties and sixties, with Imlach using his father's career to illustrate the realities of the time, and he interviews men who knew Stewart Imlach the footballer as well as using old newspaper reports to ensure it is not just a regurgitation of myths.

I must say I am more familiar with Gary as a presenter than as an author, so this came as a pleasant surprise. It appears to be motivated by a desire to understand what his parents' life was like, as well as his father's career, but the cheering on of his father through past seasons never feels tiresome, but was quite illuminating: Derby having 'no slums' was a myth to get his father to move clubs, but puts the modern worries about housing in perspective, and Imlach's first photo as a professional footballer is taken as he is working as an apprentice joiner. His father has four caps for Scotland, two of which were in a World Cup, then disappears from national view, and is not even awarded a physical cap despite many later requests.

One of Gary's main strengths is to recount interviews accurately, but checking the facts and rarely endorsing the viewpoint. The Scotland defeat to France in '58 did not feature a counter-attack after a penalty hit the bar, but the story is dutifully described in poetic terms, and ensures the interviewees are allowed personalities, but not to invent their own stories. Looking back, Gary also steers clear of painting the 50s as a time when 'men were men' despite his own (briefly described) misgivings towards modern football. Players and managers tried underhand tactics just as they do now.

This was not a comprehensive history in the mould of a Jonathan Wilson, but there was still room for education, such as the events that led to the abolition of the maximum wage and the collective action, as well as the more emotional discussion which avoided mawkishness. I'd perhaps avoid it if I had no interest in football, but that's a given really.

Paul says

Gary Imlach has succeeded in writing an excellent and revealing story of his father's football career. Stewart Imlach was a player I'd never heard of before reading this book. A flying winger, he was a Scottish international in the 1950s and represented them in the 1958 World Cup. He played for a variety of clubs south of the border, most notably at Nottingham Forest in the earlier stages of his career where he appeared and starred in their victorious '59 FA Cup winning side. Once retired from playing he goes on to be a part of Everton's coaching staff in the 1970 league title winning side - a team featuring Ball, Harvey, Kendall and Royle amongst others.

Where this book really impressed me (and contrary to other reviews, I think it is very well written) was in the way that it gives the reader a complete insight into the reality of being a professional in the game during the era of 'retain and transfer' and the maximum wage. It really hammers home that while there were undoubtedly many faults with those systems that were tantamount to servile tied labour, the pendulum has indeed swung far too far away from those days when fans really respected their club's players as both footballers AND members of society. Many sporting biographies serve to heap praise on the subject and fail to get across the real person behind the story. Imlach's book doesn't fall into this trap at all. The father whose sporting achievements were not so apparent to the writer at the time they happened - he either wasn't born yet or was just a lad - becomes more understood than ever as his story is uncovered via the many newspaper

cuttings discovered and teammate interviews undertaken.

At times full of pathos and admiration for the humble aspirations the 'working-class heroes' in the title would have, in an era far removed from the fast cars, 'WAGS', and 'bling' of the modern cash-soaked game, Imlach has expressed with a journalist's guile and a wonderfully dry sense of humour what our beautiful game once was like - from the inside. Towards the end, as Imlach Snr's career had ended, and illness changed him from a bundle of blurring energy into an armchair-bound TV fan, we come to understand just how dramatically the game has changed so much, especially in the modern era of 24/7 media coverage, Premier League big money broadcasting rights, agents' manipulations, and widespread disloyalty to the clubs - ergo the fans. It was wonderful to momentarily forget all about that and revel in the era of football when the players still had off-season jobs and got the bus to the training ground...

A wonderful slice of modern social history to boot, this William Hill Sports Book of the Year is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in sports history in general and football in particular.

Mel Siew says

A personal biography by Gary Imlach of his father's player career. Rather sadly, the project only gathered pace after the death of his father and there is a slight undertone of melancholy in certain parts.

What the book does fantastically well is to provide an insight into what being a football player was really like in the 1950s and 1960s. We all know about the abolition of the maximum (or should do), but do we really know what the real-life implications were of the retain-and-transfer system?

Other samples which underline the difference between that era and modern money-fuelled times are: the SFA banning live broadcasts from the 1958 World Cup in Sweden as they might affect attendances at Highland League Games; the SFA again for only awarding 1 cap a year and only to players who played in Home Internationals (this has since been changed); players taking up summer jobs.

A well-written book and worthy winner of the 2005 William Hill Sports Book of the Year.

Bill says

I got My Father and Other Working-Class Heroes by Gary Imlach for Christmas about 10 years ago amongst a collection of books about footie; my newly discovered passion. I read quite a few of them, but unfortunately, for no particular reason, this one was relegated to my 'to-be-read' bookshelf. I have to say I'm glad that I dusted it off as an end 2016 selection as it was an excellent book.

The story follows Stewart Imlach, a Scottish football player, an excellent winger who had a successful career at Nottingham Forest and other English football clubs. His progress, from playing in a youth league in Lossiemouth, Scotland to the end of his life, is tracked by his son, Gary Imlach, who tries to discover a father whose life he ended up knowing little about.

The book offers an interesting perspective on the state of football in England during the '50s and '60s, when players were basically chattel of the owners, due to the 'Retain-and-transfer' rule (I'll let you look it up, if you are so inclined.)

I enjoyed this story. I enjoyed the incidents and life that Imlach's father lived, his love of the game, his

ability and also a view of a football period of which I knew very little. Glad I finally read it and glad my missus got it for me as a gift. (4 stars)

David McDowell says

Another great book from my Dad! Journalist Gary Imlach goes in search of his father's professional football career - an area that he never gave enough attention while he was still around.

He spends time discussing his football schooling in Lossiemouth, his career in England (including Cup win) and for Scotland with the ridiculous 50s transfer and contract systems and finally his coaching and later years in the game. He has obvious pride in his father's achievements and a keen eye for the wider history of the game.

An aspect that I particularly like was the different and confused memories of certain events by different players. An example is the Scotland game at Switzerland 58 where the whole team remembered hitting the bar with a penalty, the ball rebounding to half-way and France scoring. The incidents were actually 20 mins apart!

I'm going to read more football books from now on...

Kahn says

What started out as one man's attempt to get to know more about his father's footballing career turns into a study of how the game has changed in the last 60 years.

It's emotional, heart-warming, and by the end you feel you know Stuart Imlach almost as well as his son Gary does.

Adrian says

I really enjoyed this book as I am of an age that can relate very closely to this era (Gary and I are the same age).

It details what football (soccer) was like here in England through the 50s, 60s and into the 70s, so different to today's multi million pound stars and businesses.

Having watched Gary commentate on the Tour de France for the past 20 years I can as I read, hear his voice narrating his father's story. And that makes the story more interesting and brings it to life.

For anyone who has any interest in what football was like 40+ years ago in the UK or even just life for normal families, this is a book I would wholeheartedly recommend.

Janne Typpi says

Kirjoittaja kiinnostuu isänsä Stewart Imlachin äkillisen kuoleman jälkeen tämän jalkapallourasta. Skotlantilainen Imlach pelasi lyhyehkön uran huipputasolla 1950- ja -60 -luvuilla. Tarinasta tulee viehättävä matka sen ajan Englantiin. Jalkapallo oli työläisammatti muiden joukossa, mutta sitä tehtiin suurella intohimolla

Scott Gardner says

I love these old football stories , how the game used to be before money ruined it.
This book shows how the players were treated as nothing more than serfs in the 1950's , clubs could sack you and hold your registration blocking you from playing , it would take the bosman ruling decades later to change this.
Other little stories are in there as Gary Imlach follows his fathers playing career

Phil Mc says

This isn't a typical football book, not that I read many. Rather, it is three distinct books which don't always sit well together.

The first, as much because it starts the book this way as the fact that it seems the primary motivation for Imlach's writing, is a very personal insight into his father's footballing life. A son's devotion to his departed dad shines from the pages but only ever briefly engages the reader fully.

The second book within this book is the historical (statistical and anecdotal) recording of a time when footballers were "the last bonded men in England" not to mention hard as nails and working-class to boot (literally in many tales). It is this 'second book' where the interest is spiked and held. As a child of the eighties, the players' strike, maximum wages and the pre-Bosman era retain-transfer system fill me with equal parts of horror and wonder. Sadly though, 'books' one and two often broke the flow of this insightful and colourful documentation of football past.

Finally, this is a biographical exploration of Imlach's growing disinterest with the modern game and its mega-star millionaires who bear as much relation to his father as I do to a cumquat. As someone who is also becoming disenfranchised with the modern game this was interesting, and in many ways reassuring (a bit like a printed support group) however, its interruption of the really interesting bits was irksome at best.

A detailed and passionate exploration of the game and certainly well worth the cover price: In spite of its flaws, this should be on every footballing fan's reading list.

Matthew Gaughan says

I'd been thinking about reading this book for ages, but feared it might be a bit cloying and cliched. It's not. It's an absorbing, beautiful reflection on how football, and by extension Britain and working-class tradition, has changed so much since the 1950s, some of the changes good, some of them bad, some inevitable. It's done through the portrait of the author's father, but this portrait isn't sentimental - it's a thorough attempt to understand him through his own achievements and failings and the times he lived in. It's one of those rare books which convincingly mixes the personal and the historical, making it immediate and informative, compelling and enlightening. The Scottish FA don't come out of it well at all so some things never change.

Gumble's Yard says

Well written and engaging biography of Imlach's footballing father (a 1958 World Cup participant and 1959 FA Cup winner); one part an attempt to come to terms with the death of his father by recreating his career through press cuttings, family memorabilia and by interviewing his peers; one part a paean to a different age of football before the cynicism of the 1970s and the glamour of the 1990s; one part about working class footballers and the struggles over maximum wages, tightly held registrations and restrictive contract terms. Ironically it is the latter battle that paves the way for the loss of the footballing ethos as under maximum wages a form of evenness of competition was imposed on teams especially as appearance money could mean a 4th division player was paid more than a 1st division player.
