

50

YEARS OF FOOTY

Next year marks a significant year for British football. Half a century ago, England won the FIFA World Cup. Football, it seemed then, could only go upwards in the land of its inventors. As those clean-cut heroes from England's team hoisted the hallowed trophy skywards, it appeared that not only were the football gods smiling on the team that day, but that the game would ultimately be in good hands. Fifty years on, Britain's game is loved by millions worldwide, while its best clubs are the darling of big brands and bold billionaires. But what of the game: what's changed since? Has the growth benefitted the sport? And for lifelong fans like **Chris Wright**, is a day at the footy still as golden for a father and son, as it was growing up for him? *DCM* tears down the touchline for some answers, with the help of one of the original World Cup heroes, now following a very different path

ENGLISH CAPTAIN BOBBY MOORE IN ACTION (IN RED) DURING THE WORLD CUP FINAL AT WEMBLEY STADIUM IN LONDON, JULY 30, 1966. ENGLAND WON THE GAME AGAINST WEST GERMANY — A FEAT THEY HAVE NOT MANAGED TO REPEAT FOR 50 YEARS

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



IN THIS ICONIC IMAGE ENGLAND CAPTAIN BOBBY MOORE TRIUMPHANTLY RAISES THE JULES RIMET TROPHY, WHILE BEING HELD ALOFT BY RAY WILSON. THEIR VICTORIOUS TEAMMATES GATHER AROUND, INCLUDING NOBBY STILES ON THE FAR LEFT, TO CELEBRATE THEIR WIN AT THE 1966 WORLD CUP FINAL AT WEMBLEY STADIUM. LEFT, ENGLISH PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER RAY WILSON PICTURED DURING A TRAINING SESSION FOR THE ENGLISH NATIONAL TEAM IN 1963.

July 30, 1966, and the flags are fluttering high above the twin towers of Wembley Stadium. It's the red and white of England on one tower, the red, yellow and black of West Germany on the other: though to anyone watching the BBC's exclusive coverage of the game, it is of course, all black and white. Twenty-one years after the end of the Second World War, which had pitted these nations against each other, there's still an edge on this afternoon as they meet one another in the World Cup final. Even the BBC's impeccably enunciated commentator on the game, Kenneth Wolstenholme, flew more than a hundred bombing missions over Germany earlier in his life.

Many of the people standing in the crowd are in suits. In the royal box, Queen Elizabeth looks young and beautiful. Her husband Prince Philip looks remarkably identical to today, grimacing in a sort of tongue-poked sneer. Prime Minister Harold Wilson is watching. Next to him, someone is smoking, and if you look closely you can see him stub out his cigarette butt on the floor of the royal box. On the field, the players have names like Nobby Stiles.

It looks and sounds like ancient history, and indeed it is. So much has happened in the intervening period, both in the world and in the "beautiful game". But that moment in 1966 remains the first and, to date, the last time that England — supposedly the country that brought the game to the world — won football's finest prize. Next year, it will be 50 years,

and counting. Indeed, few would bet on the trophy being reclaimed by England before 60 years is out, or even 70 years.

Still, surely all that means is that competition is now alive and well in this most global of games, and that a dozen European or South American teams might soon lift the prize. And before long, perhaps one from Asia, Africa or North America. So just how much has really changed in the world of football? Was that sunny day really the bygone age it

now appears to be, or are the fundamentals of the beautiful game still intact?

THE GOLDEN NAMES

Aficionados of the game would be able to name a fair few of the England team that lifted the trophy in 1966. Most would remember the dashing captain Bobby Moore, the Charlton brothers; Bobby and Jack, and the magnificent goalkeeper Gordon Banks. Or the triumphant Geoff Hurst.

There's a special place in the heart for Nobby Stiles, gap-toothed and gurning, seemingly the antithesis of an athlete, yet in fact visionary in his position. More avid students of the game will recall skillful Martin Peters. The Liverpool forward Roger Hunt. Small and squeaky Alan Ball. The full-back George Cohe — and a man who didn't play, the brilliant striker Jimmy Greaves, dropped for the game by manager Alf Ramsey. There were no substitutes back then.

But Ray Wilson? Anyone remember him? They should. Ray Wilson was the other fullback opposite left back Cohen: and the two of them had spent much of the tournament redefining just what that position could mean, appearing all over the pitch, putting in crosses and then scampering back to defend. He was a long-established senior player by 1966, and had already played in a World Cup in Chile four years earlier — and not long before the 1966 final, he had lifted the FA Cup for Everton.

He played an outstanding tournament, even if he was responsible for Germany's opening goal in the final. And then, in that most iconic of 1966 photographs, with the proud, blonde and handsome Bobby Moore raised on the shoulders of his teammates, the Jules Rimet trophy held easily aloft in his right hand, Wilson is the one bearing most of Bobby's weight: his shoulder supporting the great man's left buttock. There's even a statue of that photo now, outside West Ham's football stadium in London's east end.

So why wouldn't we remember Ray Wilson? Perhaps it's because not long after the World Cup Final, he turned away from the game. In fact, he turned about as far as it is possible to go — to become an undertaker in Huddersfield and Halifax, Yorkshire. He literally went from inspiring people to burying them. And surely if anyone can, this is a man who can show us how things have changed in 50 years.



Discovery Channel Magazine finds Wilson and his wife Pat, in the Pennine village of Slaithwaite. We are not far from Huddersfield, a town reached through roads with names like Thick Hollins, Netherthong Road and Ned Lane. This is indeed classic Yorkshire Pennines, with everything that your hopeful mental picture of such a place might include: the stone viaduct, the precipitous hills with rain-stained terraces tumbling down them. The slowly meandering river with ducks plopping along atop it. There's a restored canal, a chimneystack of black brick, a pub called the Shoulder of Mutton — and a café where the full English breakfast is not

complete without both black and white pudding.

Pat Wilson, a friendly and generous woman with a sense of unflappable steadiness about her, meets DCM at the gate of her house perched on one of the many hills around the town. She introduces us to their exuberant dog Joe, before Ray emerges from the kitchen to meet us too.

From pictures of him over the years, it's hard at first to know what to expect. The rugged hard man he appears to be in club photos from his Huddersfield, Everton and England days perhaps? Simon Hattenstone, the *Guardian* journalist who tried to track down the surviving members of the 1966 team eight years earlier, described him thus: "Cross the Ancient Mariner with Compo from *The Last of the Summer Wine* and you've got Ray Wilson."

Yet in person, the word that springs to mind about this white-bearded chap is mischievous. Wilson is twinkley-eyed and winking, all cheeky asides and one-liners, in a voice that mixes Yorkshire with a bit of the mid-sentence plunges of the Midlands — the result of growing up in Shirebrook, an old mining town on the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire border.

Wilson is a perfect representation of how the life of the professional footballer has changed over time. It is telling that, in shifting from his job doing shift work on the railways, he actually took a significant pay cut to join the Huddersfield Town football club in 1952. And this was not atypical: most of the "Class of '66" would have been in an industrial job if they had not excelled at football: Jack Charlton, for example, briefly worked down a coal pit.

Was work on the railways in those days tough? "No, that wasn't as tough as wagon repairing," he says. "I had that job before the railways. Shoving the coal on, and what-have-you." He can't have been older than 15 at the time. In those days, Wilson was earning £15 (US\$23) a week working on the railways, which was decent pay for his young age, and the work involved.

"When I went to Huddersfield, I signed for £5 a week," he says. "I paid £2.75 for my digs,"



ENGLAND FANS IN THE STANDS DURING 1966 FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL BETWEEN ENGLAND AND WEST GERMANY AT WEMBLEY STADIUM
LEFT: AN IMAGE FROM THE FIFA 2015 BARCLAY TRAILER FOR XBOX 360

he says, referring to his lodgings. "I could afford a bus one day — but then I had to walk the next two days, because I couldn't afford it again." That meant a few miles each way. And then he even had to buy his own football boots.

Pat looks across at him. "We've been poor, haven't we?" How does she remember the time? "Well, we were broke, absolutely stony broke, when we first married," she recalls. "We had nothing. We could just about afford to survive and that was it." However, at least when they married, their accommodation changed from the digs Ray had shared with four or five friends. "In those days there wasn't any mortgage to pay, because we paid £1 a week's rent to stay in a club house." She shakes her head. "But for a year or two, when I worked, before I gave up, I was earning more than Ray." Doing what, we ask. "I worked in the mill, I was a mender."

INTERNATIONAL EYES

The mill mender, supporting the professional footballer. We are speaking to each other in a week when English professional footballer Wayne Rooney has just signed a new deal with his club Manchester United to allow him to earn £300,000 (US\$460,193) per week. Still, it's not unusual, even today, for young footballers to struggle, and even in 2015, the lower leagues are full of people

WILSON WOULD LATER SIGN FOR EVERTON, A CLUB, WHICH THEN AS IT IS NOW, WAS AMONG THE FINEST AND RICHEST FOOTBALL CLUBS IN BRITAIN. YET EVEN THEN, WILSON ONLY EARNED £50 (US\$77) A WEEK

barely staying afloat, or running other jobs to get by.

But what is striking about Wilson's experience, and what was wholly representative of that time, is that it stayed pretty much the same even when he became a full international. At the pinnacle of his abilities, he would later sign for Everton, a club, which then as it is now, was among the finest and

richest football clubs in Britain. Yet even then, Wilson only earned £50 (US\$77) a week.

Still, in the classic Yorkshire way, this description of near-poverty is not told for sympathy, so much as with a sense of pride of getting by. "We've lived a decent life," says Pat. "But we've never been big spenders, have we, Ray?"

"Well, I'm not," he shoots back. Pat groans. He will spend the interview winding up his wife, and then winking, while Pat shoots him looks that blend infinite contempt with long-suffering tolerance. Together in person, they're a fantastic double act, grounded and enormously likable.

When Wilson joined Huddersfield Town, then in the second division (which in England today, is called the Championship), he came in working on the ground staff, and then had to battle his way up into the first team. Before having much of a chance to do so, he was called up for National Service, and was sent to Egypt.

Did he still play while there? "Oh, yeah. I played inside left," he says. "We had some really good wins out there: we beat Egypt a couple of times, and we beat Cyprus, a decent team at that time." On what pitches? "In the serious areas there were grass pitches, like in the cities and what-have-you. But we played out on the sand really." He was 20 years old when he came back.

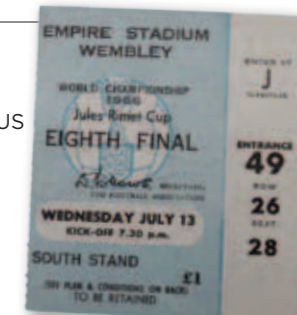
Once he did so, it was back to Huddersfield: which is no doubt what he wanted. But then again, he would have had no choice but

THEN AND NOW WORLD CUP STATS

PAY

1966: THE ENGLAND SQUAD RECEIVE A BONUS OF £1,000 EACH FOR WINNING THE WORLD CUP

2010: THE AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE OF A PREMIERSHIP PLAYER IS MORE THAN 50 TIMES THE UK AVERAGE



COVERAGE

1966: SOME 400 MILLION PEOPLE TUNE IN TO WATCH ENGLAND DEFEAT GERMANY

2010: FIFA REPORTS ALMOST ONE BILLION VIEWERS WATCH THE SOUTH AFRICA WORLD CUP FINAL



MARKETING

1966: WORLD CUP WILLIE, AN ENERGETIC LION, IS THE FIRST OFFICIAL FIFA WORLD CUP MASCOT

2010: MARKETING ACCOUNTS FOR NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF FIFA'S TOURNAMENT PROFIT



stay at his club. "Once you signed in those days, that was it. You signed for that team for life. You couldn't do like it is now, where after a couple of years with one team you can disappear to another team."

"Which is fair enough, when you think about it: when you're working, you can leave work and go and work with somebody else. But they wouldn't let you do that in football. You might say: 'I'd like to move away from here.' Well, right, bugger off, you're not playing for anybody else. You were tied to them until they wanted to get rid of you."

Still, once he cracked the first team, Wilson thrived, quickly rising to become an international player. It wasn't so unusual then, for a second division player to reach national honours: there wasn't the freedom of inter-club movement that would concentrate ability among a handful of teams, as is the case today. More than that, Wilson became a new kind of player.

"I started as an inside left as a kid, then played outside left, then I played left half, then left back. Then my next move was left out," he quips. While he is being self-deprecating, the transition he describes — from a winger to a full back, in modern parlance — marked quite a significance for the game, and especially so in 1966.

"Full backs in those days were six foot two (189

centimetres) and 15 stone (95 kilograms) and it took them 10 minutes to turn around," he jokes. "Whereas the wingers they were playing against were five foot five (168 centimetres)

THERE ARE PLENTY WHO DO BELIEVE BALLS LIKE THAT HAVE CAUSED MILD BRAIN DAMAGE. IT WAS ABSOLUTELY ROUTINE AT THE TIME TO SEE CENTRE-BACKS COMING OFF THE FIELD BLEEDING

and were straight past them." He makes a whooshing noise and motions with his hands. "So it seemed to me a good idea for full backs to be the same as wingers: to be quick. That was the start of it."

If you watch a recording of the 1966 final, Wilson at left back and George Cohen at right back would not look out of place in a 21st century Premiership side. They are everywhere: forging forward, getting almost to the opposition goal line — and putting crosses in before tracking back to try to keep pace with opposing wingers. They're not just defenders but a source

of attack: overlapping with their own players, particularly since England manager Alf Ramsey had abandoned his own wingers earlier in the tournament.

This was revolutionary stuff in the 1960s, and Wilson has been described as England's first modern full back. "It was new," he admits. "It was just about the start of that."

Other elements of the game were far less progressive, not least the ball. If you go to the excellent Museum of Football in Manchester, you can see the match ball from 1966.

Aside from being a surprisingly vivid orange, the ball shows every bit of its half century-old vintage. It's battered, made of interlocking leather panels, and looks very heavy. Still, it looks in considerably better shape than another ball in the same cabinet, with which England were hammered seven-to-one by Hungary in 1954. That one looks like a deflated leather vegetable — some sort of lethal alien potato that has been drenched, cooked, battered and buried.

"The ball was pretty heavy, and especially when it was raining and the water was getting inside the ball," he remembers. "And of course it had laces on. So when you headed that," he describes, making a noise like a cartoon, as if Tom were being smacked about by Jerry with a frying pan. "It hurt." When he recorded an interview for the Everton Former Players Foundation in 2008, Wilson said, perhaps in jest, that heading such a ball is the reason he now needs to take tablets to fend off senility.

Whether he meant that or not, there are plenty who do believe balls like that have caused mild brain damage. It was absolutely routine at the time to see centre-backs coming off the field bleeding.

Wilson made it to the 1962 World Cup in Chile while still plying his trade at second division Huddersfield. He says his time in national service meant he wasn't overawed by the novelty of the place. England acquitted themselves well, losing in a quarter final to the Brazil side that would win that year's World Cup.

Through this and later tournaments, he would play against some of the greatest people in the history of the game: Pele, Puskas, Eusebio, Beckenbauer. That said, he still rates Stanley Matthews as the greatest he ever played against. "The referees used to look after

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT); CORBIS (TOP LEFT)

THE TEAMS ARRIVE ON THE PITCH AT WEMBLEY STADIUM FOR THE 1966 WORLD CUP FINAL MATCH BETWEEN ENGLAND AND WEST GERMANY
LEFT: AN IMAGE FROM THE FIFA 2015 GAME FOR XBOX ONE
FAR LEFT: THE WEST BROMWICH ALBION FOOTBALL TEAM 1970/71

him," he quips. "I had my name taken for farting in front of him."

"No you didn't!" objects Pat. "Stop it! That's a joke." We know it is, because incredibly for a defender, Ray was booked only once in his entire career, and not for a foul, but for dissent. You were a clean player, *DCM* notes. "I was. I'm a clean husband as well." Is that true, Pat? "Shut up," he counters, that sparkle still clear in the eyes.

ORDINARY HEROES

If you are English, the World Cup victory in 1966 has a role in the national psyche similar to that of the lunar landings in the American popular culture. And the more time elapses since it happened, the more improbable it seems that it ever actually occurred in the first place. The prospect of ever winning the World Cup again is such a tantalising yet distant dream that the feat of having won it in



1966 is progressively magnified by every successive failure.

The truth is, the heroes of 1966, as they've latterly come to be seen, were never really properly rewarded for what they did. Bobby Moore, the charismatic captain, died young and in financial trouble: the adulation with which he is now remembered in England seems to have been largely posthumous. Yet now? They're venerated, sainted, awarded, a reminder that England once excelled at the game that it exported to the world, before spending half a century being knocked out of major tournaments by Germans, Argentinians and Portuguese,

usually on penalties. But, back then, was the fever pitch as insane? Not so much, in fact the build-up to 1966 sounds almost mundane.

On the morning of the final, Ray Wilson was rooming with Bobby Charlton, as he had done for some time. "Alf Ramsey [the team manager] roomed me with Bobby," he says. "I was one of them to just let time go by before the match. Bobby always had to kill time by doing shopping, buying this, buying that. And of course he took me with him."

When out shopping with Bobby, Wilson would find himself largely anonymous. "Everywhere we went, everybody was saying: 'Bobby! Bobby Charlton! Look! And who's that little bugger with him?' He laughs cheekily. Still, on the weekend of the final, Ray had something else to occupy him. His wife had blown up the car.

"I drove down on the Friday with Norma Charlton," says Wilson, Norma being Bobby's wife. Halfway down the motorway, the exhaust went on her Ford Zephyr. "Oh, it did! What a noise it made, as well. Oh, my God." It is fair to say that Pat is more emotive about the explosion of the Ford Zephyr's exhaust than she is about the World Cup final itself. "So I dropped the car off where they were staying, and I said, 'he'll have to get that sorted in the morning.'"

It was, perhaps, a useful way to kill any nerves, spending the morning of our nation's most significant sporting moment getting a car exhaust fixed. But in truth, Ray was little affected by nervousness. Asked about the atmosphere within Wembley as he entered the stadium, he notes, "If you thought that was going to bother you, you wouldn't have been on anyway." Though Pat, who was watching with all the other wives, felt differently. "I was very nervous. I hardly watched the match," she recalls. "I certainly didn't watch the extra time."

On the TV footage, Wilson looks tough and stocky, with thin hair cropped short. He has the look of a short but powerful TV hard-man. As a player, he'd



SPECTATORS AT THE STADIUM DURING THE FIFA WORLD CUP MATCH IN ENGLAND, JULY 1966.

RIGHT: BOTH SIDES OF THE WINNERS MEDAL AWARDED TO ENGLAND FULL-BACK RAY WILSON FOLLOWING THEIR VICTORY OVER WEST GERMANY.

LEFT: ARGENTINE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYER LIONEL MESSI AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN SPAIN FOR THE LAUNCH OF A NEW ADIDAS SHOE LINE.

had a terrific tournament, but his World Cup final did not start well. After 12 minutes, Wilson planted a weak header right in front of Helmut Haller, who scored. From then on though, he had an excellent game, frequently forward, never slumping despite an extra time that took the total playing time to two hours — in an era when no substitutes were allowed.

"I played a reasonable game," he says, recalling the match. "I made a bit of a mess with the first goal for the Germans, I have to say that. But I say to them," he says of his teammates, "'Well, I set you going, because when we were one-nil down, we started playing then.'" He is chuckling, of course, but clearly the error has never caused him any demons, particularly because things improved after that.

The game itself is forever remembered for a few key moments: Germany's last-minute equaliser in normal time, when England were literally seconds from winning; Geoff Hurst's endlessly disputed goal in extra time which bounced on the line (if you're German) or slightly over the line (if you're English), a moment that made a lifetime celebrity of Azerbaijani linesman Tofik Bahramov. And the very last kick of the game, as Hurst raced forward once again.

Surely most of England's football fans can recite Wolstenholme's commentary. "Some people are on the pitch. They think it's all over." Hurst unleashes a vicious shot into the German net. "It is now!" And then there's Bobby Moore, politely wiping the sweat from his palms before taking the trophy and lifting it with a smile as Bobby Charlton, behind him, bursts into tears. "God Save the Queen" is observed, the Queen herself, in a furry hat, still looking so youthful (with Phillip still looking miserable). There's Nobby Stiles, gappy and bounding — and there's Bobby Moore on Wilson's shoulders.

"Oh yeah!" shouts Ray, reminded of the photo and statue. "Who's the fellow with him?" "Geoff Hurst," says Pat. "Don't swear." He hasn't sworn.



"He's about six to eight inches (15 to 20 centimetres) taller than me, so Bobby's just off his shoulder. He's only on mine." When sculptor Philip Jackson conceived the sculpture, he gave Wilson an expression of solid, dependable strength: which it seemed was entirely fitting for his performance through the game as a whole. But it is not quite historically accurate: if you look at the pictures the sculpture was modelled on, Wilson is clearly grimacing under Bobby Moore's weight.

What did they do after the game? The banter is typical of a long-time couple. Pat says: "Well, there was a banquet, if you like, with everyone else and their wives there, but we wives weren't invited. After that, we did go out. Can't remember where. Did we go dancing?" "No," says Ray. "I know we went to a club somewhere, but I can't remember where." Pat: "We'd have had a pint or two, didn't we?" "Oh, I'd imagine so," notes Ray. Just try to imagine what the players and WAGS (wives and girlfriends) would get up to if England won the World Cup today.

THE NEW GAME

If you had to pick one thing that has changed since Wilson's day, that is easy: everything. Wealth has changed. Player power has changed. The existence of agents has entered the sport. The demographic of football supporters has changed. The intersection of commercialism

— of advertising, of TV sponsorship, of Manchester United's official South-east Asian noodle partner — has changed. Fitness has changed. The treatment of injuries has changed. The international movement of players has changed. The one thing that's still the same? Everyone still wants to win the World Cup.

On April 19, 2015, *DCM* arrives at Wembley Stadium to watch the semi-final of the FA Cup between Liverpool and Aston Villa. It is, strictly speaking, the same place where Wilson and his teammates lifted the World Cup trophy in 1966. But in fact, even that's different too: Wembley has since been razed to the ground and rebuilt. Its famous twin towers replaced with a soaring white arch.

For the fans, it is hard to know where to start with the differences in the experience between then and now, some for better, some for worse. The ticket price for today's match is £53 (US\$81). Those attending in 1966 bought a book of tickets for the England matches — but, inflated to today's money, it would have cost about £11 (US\$17) to be at the World Cup final.

Arriving at the stadium, we are marshaled now by mounted police, who are taking instruction from helicopters above them about the ebb and flow of the 85,000 people who will eventually arrive to attend the game. Post-Hillsborough stadium disaster,

British crowd management is today outstanding, though as recently as the late 1980s, it was haphazard and dangerous.

DCM goes through security and bag checks, which would never have been necessary in 1966, then mount a line of long sleek escalators that definitely would have had no place in 1966. We pass lines of food and beverage outlets, where one can buy three different flavours of supposedly gourmet pies, even washing it down with red wine if one feels so inclined. There's still, mercifully, scope to buy chips and a pint of bitter.

We are ushered through precise ticketing to stewards who, having searched us for alcohol, show us where to go. In 1966, most people would have been standing, and, full of unrestricted beer, occasionally taking a pee right there in the stands. In England now, all modern stadia are an all-seater format. Today we are up in the third tier, craning to look down to the pitch. There doesn't appear to be one single seat amid the 85,000 with an impeded view. This too, is a dramatic improvement from the old Wembley of 1966, where pillars abounded and blocked the way.

All around us today is advertising: on the tickets, on the screens at either end of the pitch, on the advertising hoardings, in the announcements. A man with a microphone is trying to rev up the crowd, and some pre-recorded chants are played to cajole us along. Fortunately, one thing that hasn't changed though is that modern British football fans still don't need any exhortation to sing and shout — and they do so, flatly ignoring the songs that the organisers appear to want them to sing.

The players come on. Liverpool's starting 11 players include nine nationalities. Naturally, 1966 was a final between nations. Had it been a club game, it would be very unlikely that either would field a foreigner. The England side of 1966 featured former railwaymen, miners and soldiers, none of them earning much more in football than they did in previous jobs.



PHOTO: CORBIS

LIVERPOOL FANS AHEAD OF THE FA CUP SEMI-FINAL MATCH BETWEEN ASTON VILLA AND LIVERPOOL AT WEMBLEY STADIUM ON APRIL 19, 2015 IN LONDON, ENGLAND



LIVERPOOL'S BRAZILIAN MIDFIELDER PHILIPPE COUTINHO SCORES PAST ASTON VILLA'S IRISH GOALKEEPER SHAY GIVEN (CENTRE) DURING THE FA CUP SEMI-FINAL BETWEEN ASTON VILLA AND LIVERPOOL AT WEMBLEY STADIUM IN LONDON ON APRIL 19, 2015
RIGHT: FAMED NORTHERN IRISH FOOTBALLER GEORGE BEST WAS AS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS OFF-FIELD ANTICS AS HIS ON-FIELD PROWESS

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); CORBIS (GEORGE BEST)

On the pitch today, 20-year-old Raheem Sterling is known to have refused a €100,000 (US\$153,386) per week contract, which his representatives feels is insufficient. Each of these players today have mini armies of representatives, making deals happen or stopping them from happening behind the scenes, while negotiating advertising contracts for sunglasses and deodorants and razors and hair gel, real estate and payday lenders.

When the game starts, all eyes today are on the tactics. Brendan Rodgers starts with a 3-4-3 formation, then shifts it to a 4-3-3. The fans spot it, and discuss it among themselves, such is the level of tactical awareness that has been schooled into us by post- and mid-match TV analysis. Of course, 1966 was far from being a tactical wasteland: Ramsey's wingless wonders were a tactical innovation in their own right, but formations were different, and understanding of them was probably weaker too.

Perhaps the biggest difference on the pitch today is the level of fitness. Whereas the players of 1966 might have prepared for a match day with a pie and a pint without too much trouble — George Best, the brilliant Northern Irish player of the 1970s, is believed to have played while drunk — today's players have their nutrition meticulously planned, and are run through a fitness program analysing every last scrap of body fat or lung capacity. Yet despite their superior physical strength, they also have a much easier ride, for there are seven substitutes on each bench and three may be used in any game. In 1966, if a player broke his leg in the first minute, his team just had to get on with 10 players for the remaining eighty-nine.

Full time today brings a perfectly managed exit from the stadium, as lines of police keep a careful eye on the levels of crowding at Wembley Park underground station, and hold the supporters back in well-behaved bands waiting their turn to move forward. There is no hint of trouble, just as there would not have been in 1966:

that ugly period has come, and gone, in the intervening years. The supporters have been segregated in the stadium, but are not kept apart on the trains. The atmosphere is civil, rival fans dissecting the game. It

opportunities for young English talent, while another is about it bringing diving into the game. And there's fairly widespread revulsion for the governing body, FIFA, which oversees football internationally, many would say far from impartially.

Do any of those stack up? The first complaint, about ticket prices, is probably the most legitimate, and the subject of greatest antagonism.

On August 14, 2014, for example, the Football Supporters' Federation in Britain organised a march on the Premier League headquarters demanding "affordable football for all". Fans have boycotted specific fixtures — such as Manchester City fans staying away from an away game at Arsenal when their tickets were priced at £62 (US\$95) each.

Arsenal fans themselves are charged up to £129.50 (US\$199) for a match day ticket, and sometimes more than £2,000 (US\$3,000) for a season ticket.

As recently as 1990, it was possible to stand at Manchester United's Old Trafford for £3.50 (US\$5.30). Although inflation has clearly affected the cost of all things since then, it's been relatively modest in Britain: that ticket would now be equivalent to £6.94 (US\$10.65), compared to the actual lowest-priced ticket at Old Trafford in the 2014-2015 season of £31 (US\$48), which is one of the cheapest seats at any top Premier League ground.

In Liverpool for instance, the comparison from 1990 to today is £4 (US\$6) then, £46 (US\$71) now: a increase of 1,150 percent.



THE PLAYERS OF 1966 MIGHT HAVE PREPARED FOR A MATCH DAY WITH A PIE AND A PINT WITHOUT TOO MUCH TROUBLE — GEORGE BEST, THE BRILLIANT NORTHERN IRISH PLAYER OF THE 1970S, IS BELIEVED TO HAVE PLAYED WHILE DRUNK

would be nice to think that, in this respect at least, things have moved a little closer to the good old days.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

Today, if you ask anyone in England what's wrong with football, they will give you a list. Ordinary supporters being priced out is a common complaint. Money ruining the game, is another. And you usually don't have to go too far without hearing a backlash against too many foreign players: which usually subdivides into two further camps. One is the limiting

Why is this? For a start, the comparison is not quite fair, because in 1990, the cheapest ticket didn't get you a seat. After Hillsborough, and more specifically the Taylor report that followed it, all grounds in England became all-seater, so it's no surprise that ticket prices went up to accommodate it. Also, and this is related, it's just



supply and demand. Despite the draconian price increases, the waiting list for season tickets at Liverpool or Tottenham Hotspur is so long it is actually impossible to be added to it.

That Liverpool versus Aston Villa FA Cup tie? As if the £56 (US\$86) ticket price was not enough, many fans had paid more than *four times* that in order to get the tickets from online sites, because only season ticket holders (and in fact only season ticket holders who could prove they had attended a certain number of previous FA Cup rounds) were allocated the right to buy them at face value, leading to a black market for them. When people are desperate to watch, prices go up.

The third reason, naturally, is the huge amounts that clubs now spend on player wages and transfer fees. Which brings us to the second complaint, about money ruining the game. Football is a vast business today: Manchester United's 2013 turnover (the last available figure) was £363 million (US\$557 million), with £109 million (US\$167 million) of gate and match day income, £102 million (US\$156 million) of TV and broadcasting income, £153 million (US\$235 million)

of commercial activities and a £181 million (US\$278 million) wage bill. This is at least lower than Manchester City's, which came in at £233 million (US\$357 million).

In 2013, and this figure will only have gone up since, Premier League clubs paid their players and staff £1.8 billion (US\$2.76 billion), according to the *Guardian's* football business writer David Conn. In this environment, clubs pay a fortune to compete, and are often dangerously run. In that year, 12 of the 20 Premier League clubs made a loss, and five (Aston Villa, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City and Queens Park Rangers) lost more than £50 million (US\$77 million). This, inevitably, ends up being passed back to ticket buyers, pricing many out.

Set against that, Premier League clubs benefit from the truly extraordinary amount of money that comes to them from TV rights. Sky paid £4.176 billion (US\$6.4 billion) in February for three years of UK television rights to premier league games: and even that didn't get it all the games, with BT Sport paying £960 million (US\$1.47 billion) for rights to a further 42 games. Once international rights are sold, as much as £8 billion (US\$12.27 billion) will probably have been paid.

For many though, the clearest sight of money ruining the game can be seen in the awarding of World Cup hosts by FIFA. The bidding process for the award of these tournaments is so notoriously opaque, and open to corruption, that Britain itself has pledged never to take part in another one: though let's see how long that lasts.

If the awarding of the next tournament to Russia, a country which bans homosexuality and has invaded parts of Ukraine, is controversial, that's nothing compared to the 2022 tournament in Qatar. The final will now have to be moved to the northern hemisphere winter, disrupting every single national league, because apparently nobody foresaw that it would be too hot to play in the Arabian Peninsula in July. Scarcely a week goes by



THE WAY TO WEMBLEY

Wembley Stadium in north-west London opened in 1923 after a 300-day build at a cost of £750,000 (US\$1.13 million), before being demolished in 2003 to make way for a new 90,000 capacity structure built in 2007 at a cost of £798 million. In addition to football finals, the stadium has hosted Olympic sporting events in 1948 and 2000, greyhound racing, speedway, hockey, American wrestling, and even appearances by Evel Knievel and the Pope — thankfully not together — as well as playing host to blockbuster concerts by artists including Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones and Muse.

without allegations of human rights abuses on the workforce building the stadia, or a fresh accusation that money was the only reason for agreeing to hold the tournament there.

The next argument, blaming the foreigners, is vacuous and easily dismissed. It is possible that the success of foreign players in the Premier League has impeded the development of English players and thus halted the national team's progress in World Cups. But that's hardly the fault of the foreigners. Any English football fan who has watched Thierry Henry, Luis Suarez or Cristiano Ronaldo at their best has been enriched by the experience. Even the claim that foreigners brought cheating, diving and gamesmanship to England is also a weak one: the English have as many native divers as anywhere else.

CLUBS PAY A FORTUNE TO COMPETE, AND ARE OFTEN DANGEROUSLY RUN. IN THAT YEAR, 12 OF THE 20 PREMIER LEAGUE CLUBS MADE A LOSS, AND FIVE LOST MORE THAN £50 US\$77 MILLION

In short, we can sit in the pub after a game and argue around in circles for hours about whether football is in a better or worse state than in 1966; the discussion is part of the fun. But any rational conclusion would have to be: it's a bit of both.

ENTER THE UNDERTAKER

So what do Ray and Pat Wilson make of the riches of the modern game? "I'd be delighted," says Ray. "It'd be nice to play now." Both of them say they don't begrudge modern players their money, either. "If they're going to offer it, you'd take it," Pat says. Still, they

must look at the Rooneys of this world and think: what if. "It's pointless, it can't be changed," says Wilson. "But I wouldn't mind being born 50 years later. The money would be nice."

Ray wouldn't have liked the celebrity, says his wife. But what about Pat? Would she have liked the David and Victoria Beckham existence? "That's not my life," she says. "I admire her, I admire them both. But that's not my style." Ray chips in: "She loves spending money." He's blown it this time. "No, Ray! You're being very naughty there! I don't spend any money at all, except on food."

Ray, the mischievous expression dimmed by just a touch of sheer terror, shoots me another aside. "She's getting angry," he quips, eyes ablaze. "I do get angry, because you're saying things that aren't true, and it makes me cross."

Never accuse a septuagenarian woman from Yorkshire of being a spendthrift: there is no graver accusation that can be made.

DCM moves on by making a graver mistake still, admitting to being a Liverpool fan. Pat, who is halfway across

the room with a cup of tea, stops in her tracks. "You kept that quiet! If I'd known that, you wouldn't have got in the door!" Ray chuckles away and DCM tries to make amends by telling him about one of our favourite photos, when he, at Everton, and Roger Hunt, at Liverpool, carried the World Cup trophy onto the pitch together at Goodison Park before the 1966 Charity Shield. It strikes a chord.

"Oh!" says Pat. "He's a lovely man." "Do you mean me?" asks Ray, with one more wink. "No," she says, witheringly. "I mean Roger." And Ray smiles with victorious delight. ●

THE 1966 WORLD CUP FINAL IN WEMBLEY STADIUM, PACKED TO THE RAFTERS, WITH FANS ROARING THEIR NATION'S TEAM ON UNDER LIGHTS
LEFT: FANS OF GERMANY WATCH THE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL MATCH BETWEEN GERMANY AND ARGENTINA AT THE FANMEILE PUBLIC VIEWING AT BRANDENBURG GATE ON JULY 13, 2014 IN BERLIN, GERMANY

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (LEFT); CORBIS (GERMAN FANS)