

MONEY – MONEY- MONEY!!!!

It's rather ironic when you look at the values of so many non-league fans that the aspirations of most are for their team to be successful and climb the leagues. Ironic because with that success comes money and with money comes huge wealth and with that comes the non-league supporter's mantra that money has ruined the game. A contradiction if there ever was one!

To understand the non-league supporters' idiom you need to contextualise their belief. Do they really believe money has ruined the game or are they just stating there is simply too much money in the game and values seem to be only financial and numeric rather than spiritual and behavioural?

In pre historic days, well 1961 to be exact, when Jimmy Hill was the shop steward and leading political agitator within the game, football had a maximum wage rule. However Comrade Jimmy manned the barricades, flew the red flag, and brought down the greedy officials and chairmen to get players a fair deal and get rid of the maximum wage. He wasn't wrong was he? Of course he wasn't stadiums were full to bursting point and yet players were being paid a pittance of the gate receipts while clubs grew rich on the players efforts. He was protecting players but also signposting to chairmen everywhere the gravy train had hit the buffers!

Where did all that money go to as it certainly didn't go to players, there weren't any agents and nobody will convince me it was spent on ground improvements as in the 1950's and 60's most of us were watching from terraces with stone age toilets and catering facilities who sold botulism and salmonella in equal measure. Football back then was a strange place, players had and accepted a winter wage and a summer wage and no more than twenty quid. Try that one now!

The ex-Manchester United boss Tommy Docherty once told me a story of how he tried to negotiate a pay rise at Preston North End as he was infuriated by the clubs attitude to him. Tommy at the time was club captain of PNE and Scotland and a very good player, his team mate Tom Finney was also a legend and played regularly for England. Tommy however found out that Finney was earning a pound more than him in the winter months and a pound more in the summer.

Furious at this discovery he went into see the manager and asked why this was happening. The manager's response was simple 'Tommy he's a better player than you'!

Tommy's response was true genius 'not in the bloody summer he's not' and he slammed the door on his way out!

Thanks to that leading Marxist revolutionary Comrade Hill the game was changing in the 1960's and we soon had the first £100 a week footballer in Johnny Haynes. Comrade Hill surely never intended that 50 years later his revolutionary instincts would have led to Comrade Rooney earning £300K a week. That's the crux of where many fans get their attacks of conscience versus desire. Sure they don't want to lose every week just to stay away from the riches of the game but they still have a belief that football isn't really something that should mean a guy who can kick a small spherical object earns more in week than a nurse can expect to earn in ten years.

I was looking a 1971 copy of The Sun that a Spurs supporting friend gave to me as it was the issue of the day after Arsenal won the league. (See we can get on!) Inside they did old fashioned classified adverts and were advertising for Bricklayers for £20 a week and Labourers £15 a week. Your average footballer back then was hitting the £100 a week mark, five times more than the bricklayer who as a skilled tradesman would have been reasonably well heeled on that money back then. Forty odd years on in the week that Rooney signed his £300K a week contract I couldn't help but think how many 'Brickies' do I know earning £60K a week.

That's how far the game has gone from us and that's what the fans who struggle with the values in the game find so difficult to accept. We aren't jealous as there have always been wealthy people but our values are pricked and it makes us uncomfortable. They say you can't turn the clock backwards and they are probably right. The footballer drinking in the same pub as the fan is probably gone forever and these ramblings may not reflect the discomfort of every fan but another old adage is 'careful what you wish for' and maybe we should.

Still hope we win today!

Tony Madden