

The best football films you have probably never seen by Stuart Fuller

Films about football have never been that well received by critics for a number of reasons. We've all seen *Escape to Victory* and marvelled at the footballing skill of Sylvester Stallone and the acting ability of Bobby Moore (or was it the other way round?) or the unlikely storylines of the FIFA-approved *Goal* trilogy, cringe worthy Sheffield United epic, *When Saturday Comes*. But there are some decent football-related films out there, especially when they recreate actual events. The five below are our top picks where semi-unbelievable story lines, bad acting and woefully choreographed footballing action is left on the cutting room floor.

The Miracle of Bern (2003)

One of the biggest shocks in World Cup history is now known as 'the miracle of Bern' – the name for West Germany's triumph in the 1954 finals, when Sepp Herberger's unfancied side beat Hungary's 'magic Magyars' of Puskas and co. Such was the impact of the victory on national consciousness that it's often seen as a herald of Germany's economic and political recovery after the war. The tournament also gave us one of the most famous footballing quotes when Herberger was asked whether his side could recover from an earlier heavy defeat to Hungary to beat them in the final. His response was "The ball is round. The game lasts ninety minutes. This much is fact. Everything else is theory."

Director Sönke Wortmann tells the story through the eyes of 11-year-old Matthias, boot polisher to local footballer Helmut Rahn (who would go on to score the winning goal in 1954). However Matthias's happy childhood is thrown into turmoil when his estranged father returns from a Soviet PoW camp. A great film to watch to understand where the current spirit of the German National team comes from and why they approach every tournament with the winning mentality.

The Damned United (2009)

The story of Brian Clough's 44 day stint as manager of Leeds United. When Don Revie quits Leeds to become the England boss, the outspoken Brian Clough takes charge. Determined to impose his own style upon Revie's tough tackling team, Clough soon alienates his players and the board. The film based on the book of the same name by Dave Peace is a superb tale, with Martin Sheen playing a very convincing, paranoid Brian Clough who is constantly at odds with the ghost of Revie, his own style of management and his relationship with Peter Taylor (played by Timothy Spall).

The joy of this film is in the locations, perfectly representing football and life in the mid 1970's as well as the inevitable hopelessness Clough found himself in in taking over at Leeds. Whether Brian would have approved is another matter.

Next goal wins (2014)

Mike Brett and Steve Jamison's winning documentary about the American Samoa national team starts with the most gigantic of defeats – their 31-0 loss to Australia in 2001, still an international record which saw them fall to the bottom of the FIFA World Rankings. Appropriately, the directors take the whole team as their subject, yet give special attention to two of its most extraordinary members, Jaiyah Saelua – the world's first transgender player – and their Dutch manager Thomas Rongen, as they seek their first ever competitive victory during Oceania Federation's World Cup Qualification campaign.

It's an underdog story in the purest sense, which succeeds because of its heart and charm, and its sensitivity towards its subjects. Their spirit and determination in the face of almost certain defeat –

which is most evident during the unbelievable final scenes – is an uplifting and thoroughly welcome reminder that the beautiful game is not just about the playing.

The Soccermen (2015)

The Soccermen follows two Brits who take the reins of Micronesia, a team touted as "the worst international soccer team in the world". It seemed like a good idea at the time, but coaching novices Paul (Watson, brother of comedian Mark) and Matt find themselves on a remote Pacific Island with a population whose obesity rate is 90 percent, toad-infested facilities and one of the world's wettest climates. With no resources and the hopes of 16 Islanders resting on their shoulders, the coaches take their team to the mainland in search of the island's first ever victory. On the face of it, it seems similar to the story of American Samoa, but the story is told in a different way, from the coaches' perspective and the huge task they faced on a daily basis in trying to get the basics such as a pitch, kit and enough players for a five-a-side team. The tale is an adaption of Watson's excellent book, Up Pohnpei.

The Bromley Boys (2015)

Later this season one of the most eagerly anticipated football-themed films will be released. Based on the fantastic book written by Dave Roberts, The Bromley Boys tells the story of a teenager's love of his team, Bromley FC, who were at the time, one of the worst teams in the Non-Leagues. Starring ex-Eastender Martine McCutcheon and comedian Alan Davies as Dave, and directed by Matt Lipsey who is best known for his work on Little Britain.

The film will be as much about the angst of being a teenager in suburbia in the late 1960's and early 1970's as the country went through some economic boom and bust. If you can't wait for its release then grab a copy of Roberts' superb book, or see below for a chance to win a copy of it.

Competition

To get your hands on a copy of The Bromley Boys simply tell us the score when Lewes last played Bromley in a league game. Just send us an email to stuart@lewesfc.com with your answer by xxxxx. One of the correct entrants will then be picked at random to receive Dave Roberts's book.