



# FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT

SUE BRIDGEWATER



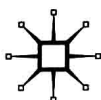
# Football Management

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First published 2010 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-0-230-23841-1 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

# Football Management

*To my sons, James and Sam*

## PREFACE

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The writing of this book on football management is intended to work on two levels. First the book aims to identify lessons which business managers can learn from reflecting upon the challenges of working in this turbulent, results-driven sector where football managers try to get teams of highly talented individuals to perform week in, week out. Second, this is a book about and for football and football managers. Having been privileged to work with football managers, football bodies and football clubs for almost ten years, the impact of shortening tenure, the massive rate of churn of football managers and the pressures under which they work are clear to see. It is hoped that this book might offer useful insights for managers, prospective managers and those who employ them.

At first glance, the topic of the book may appear to be narrow – why football management in England? Why not focus also on football management in other countries? The reasons are two-fold. The systems in football clubs vary country by country, so that models such as Sporting Director and head coach predominate in many countries. As the challenges of this system are somewhat different and it would be so difficult to capture all of this in one book, I decided to focus on exploring football management in one context. Second, English football, particularly the Premier League, attracts a global audience. Accordingly management of these clubs involves management of multi-cultural teams of players, international media and indeed involves many international managers – Roberto Mancini, Avram Grant, Roberto Di Matteo, Rafa Benitez and Paolo Sousa being just some of the managers currently managing in the English game. The book may centre on management in the English leagues, but these are of global interest.

In writing this book I have drawn on the insights which I have gained since becoming involved in football in 2001. I owe my involvement in the game to many people and, whilst it is hard to

single out individuals for thanks among so many who have helped to spark my interest and enhance my understanding of football management, I could not let this opportunity pass without extending particular thanks to John Barnwell and Howard Wilkinson at the League Managers Association, for originally championing qualifications for football managers and choosing Warwick Business School to work with them on the Certificate. My thanks also to Richard Bevan, Graham Mackrell, Frank Clark, John Duncan, Olaf Dixon for their ongoing support and commitment and to everyone at the League Managers Association for being a joy to work with. Thanks also to the Professional Footballers Association, to Gordon Taylor, Pat Lally and Jim Hicks for their generous support for the Certificate in Applied Management for football managers and to everyone at the Football Association, particularly Danielle Every and John Peacock, for their help and support over the years. Many thanks to Deloitte and Touche Sport for providing me with access to their excellent reports on football finance. These are truly invaluable to anyone who wishes to understand the challenges of football management.

The analysis and discussion in this book are based on interviews with a number of football managers who kindly gave their time, as well as on research into football management which I have conducted over the years. Any errors or omissions are down to the author alone. The interviewees are intentionally not named in the text – I would prefer to highlight the issues rather than the individual or club concerned – but they know who they are and my thanks go to them and indeed to all the football managers and prospective football managers with whom I have had the pleasure to work. May you all reap the successes you richly deserve for the time and commitment which you have shown to preparing yourself for a challenging profession.

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## INTRODUCTION

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# The Football Management Context

Mid January 2010 sees the familiar trend of football managers parting company with their clubs repeating itself. So far this season, twenty three managers have been dismissed and six have resigned (Mark Robins: Rotherham to Barnsley, Paul Lambert: Colchester to Wycombe, Gary Waddock: Aldershot to Wycombe, Hans Backe from Notts Co., Owen Coyle, Burnley to Bolton and Paul Hart from QPR. The predictable cull of football managers, often after brief periods in charge of their respective clubs, is sometimes greeted with sadness but often with relief and – even – joy by fans. Football’s “sack race” seems to have become as much of a spectacle as the matches the manager presides over. At a recent Ipswich Town match, the Sky summarizer commented that more cameras were focused on Roy Keane’s reactions from the dugout than on the match action.

Football management is an industry so turbulent that it must surely be without parallel. Whilst CEOs, Creative Directors, Head Masters, might be judged on results, often in the short-term, maybe with high levels of public scrutiny, few face the extremes of football management. This season, John Barnes was given eleven games in charge of Tranmere Rovers, in 2007–08 Martin Allen went after four games in charge of Leicester City, Dave Watson after losing a pre-season friendly at Tranmere in 2002–03, Steve Claridge from Millwall before a game had been played of the 2005–06 season and Leroy Rosenior after some ten minutes as manager of Torquay, before a change of ownership took the club in a different direction.

The average tenure of football managers is now just under a year and a half and declining. Indeed the four managers dismissed from the Premier League in 2008–09 (Ince, Adams, Scolari and Ramos) lasted an average of around six months. Table I.1 shows the departures in each league during the 2008–09 season.<sup>1</sup>

**Table I.1** Departures by league 2008–09

League	Dismissals	Resignations	Total
Premier League	4	7 <sup>2,3,4</sup>	11
Championship	8	2	10
League 1	14	1	15 <sup>5</sup>
League 2	7	2	9
Total	33	12	45

Later in this book, data on football management are studied to explore various different phenomena. These are studied from the beginning of the 1992–93 season, when the Premier League was formed. Only one manager, Sir Alex Ferguson, has been in charge for this whole period. Up until the end of the 2008–09 season he had seen 751 football managers come and go (642 of these were dismissed, 109 managers resigned, 62 of these to progress on to other clubs). Together with the other 91 incumbents – and not to mention numerous caretakers and other temporary managers – and the 29 changes so far this season (2009/10), that makes 871 football managers other than him employed in just over 17 years: almost 50 managers per season. In other words, every season more than half of all 92 football clubs change their managers. Table I.2 shows the changes in football manager tenure since 1992.

From the outside, changing football manager to shake things up, to bring in a new face, might seem part of the interest of the game. Endless discussion of the merits of appointing an up and coming star as new manager versus a time-served manager, of the style of football played, of whether one manager is more successful than another are entertaining to those whose livelihoods do not depend on the outcome. And outside of the highest levels of football management, livelihoods do, as average salaries are far lower than most people guess, job security minimal and the levels of pressure such, that one wonders why anyone would do it – other than that these are people whose entire working lives have been spent in football and who have a passion for football that keeps them coming back for more.

Yet the consequences of this level of turbulence are hard to contemplate. What would happen to our schools, businesses,

**Table I.2 Football manager tenure 1992 to date**

Season	Tenure (years)	% change
1992–93	3.12	n.a.
1993–94	2.3	–26.3
1994–95	2.55	+10.9
1995–96	2.33	–8.6
1996–97	2.42	+3.9
1997–98	1.81	–25.2
1998–99	1.68	–8.2
1999–00	2.04	+21.4
2000–01	2.13	+4.4
2001–02	2.04	–4.2
2002–03	2.02	–1
2003–04	2.08	+3
2004–05	2.23	+7.2
2005–06	1.84	–17.5
2006–07	1.89	+2.7
2007–08	1.53	–19.05
2008–09	1.47	–3.9

hospitals if half of them changed leader every year? What kind of market does that create for labor? What kind of cost does it place on these organizations to pay off previous leaders, hire and support the new incumbent? What are the implications for the culture of the organization? For the people who are being led, “my way or the highway” takes on a whole new meaning when there are a veritable spaghetti junction of different roads that this array of managers may favor. Not that way, this way! That was half a season and two managers ago.

Over time, football has gone through a period of radical change, of rapid commercial development and growth. Alongside the increasing broadcast revenue and ability to attract the best players into the English game, there have been negative episodes such

as the demise of ITV Digital and Setanta and highly publicized financial problems at some clubs as player wages have increased, sometimes to levels above the total revenue of the club.

Football management is now a profession acted out under the spotlight, judged – often harshly – in the short-term based on highly public performances by a set of talented individuals who often earn more than their managers and whom the football manager must motivate to deliver week in week out.

This book attempts to offer insights into football management based on:

- Data on various aspects of football manager performance from 1992 to date.
- Interview data with football managers.
- Learning from management theory.

Using these different sources, the book will try to present a comprehensive picture of the challenges and also explore how these challenges shed light on issues which also apply to managers in a broader range of results-driven, talent management situations.

## **Through the goldfish bowl**

It is hard to imagine just what it would be like to be a football manager unless you have dealt with the unique combination of managing in the spotlight, under intense pressure and with the lack of control over outcome so that, once the players cross the line, no matter how much you gesticulate on the touchline, you have limited ability to influence the course of the game.

Whatever you have practised in training, whatever game plan you might have prepared might be useless after the first kick of the game – a goal conceded, a penalty given away, a player sent off. Football management is management in an exceptionally unpredictable world. One of the main reasons that fans remain in thrall to the game of football is that, unlike going to the theatre or watching a film, we never know what the end will be. That is great for spectators, less good for fans whose hearts are in their mouths with every kick and worse still for the football manager whose job and livelihood may rest on the outcome.



“You are never more than six games away from getting the sack”, or so popular myth would have it.

Whilst some football managers progress their way up the ranks from coach to assistant manager to manager and pick up hints and techniques from managers they played under and those whom they work alongside, others are thrust straight into the spotlight. As Table I.2 shows, football managers have an average life span of just under one and a half years in the role and almost half of all first-time managers never get a second chance to manage.

In 2008–09, the higher up the leagues you managed, it seemed that the greater the pressure and the less the patience of Boards of Directors. Last season, in the English Premier League, the four sacked managers, Ince, Scolari, Adams and Ramos, had an average tenure of less than six months. This was at odds with the trends of the last few seasons in which Premier League tenure had been longer and there were fewer dismissals, as you might expect, given the more experienced and successful managers who hold these top positions. It is certainly a challenge for young managers, no matter how great they were as players, to come in at that level and succeed.

There is little room to make mistakes, football management is management in the full glare of the media spotlight, managing in a “goldfish bowl” where every action and gesture is on view. Most senior managers can recall one or two episodes along the way where things didn’t go to plan, for which they took the consequences, minimized the damage, learnt a valuable lesson and moved on to become better managers. No such chance for many football managers. From the first match, fans, media, Board and players are watching. Every decision will be analyzed, every gesture replayed on television and discussed in the media, on football phone-ins and on internet web-boards. This is an exceptionally steep learning curve and there is no chance of making mistakes and learning from them without anyone noticing.

It is almost comical to talk to managers the day after a match – not just after a “big” match but any match – and to realize how many of them have lost their voices, have screamed themselves hoarse from the touchline, in the heat of the action. Comical, except when allied to the information on stress management and the number of heart problems among football managers who cope with these pressures once or twice a week over an extended period.