

## This is England '66: an introduction

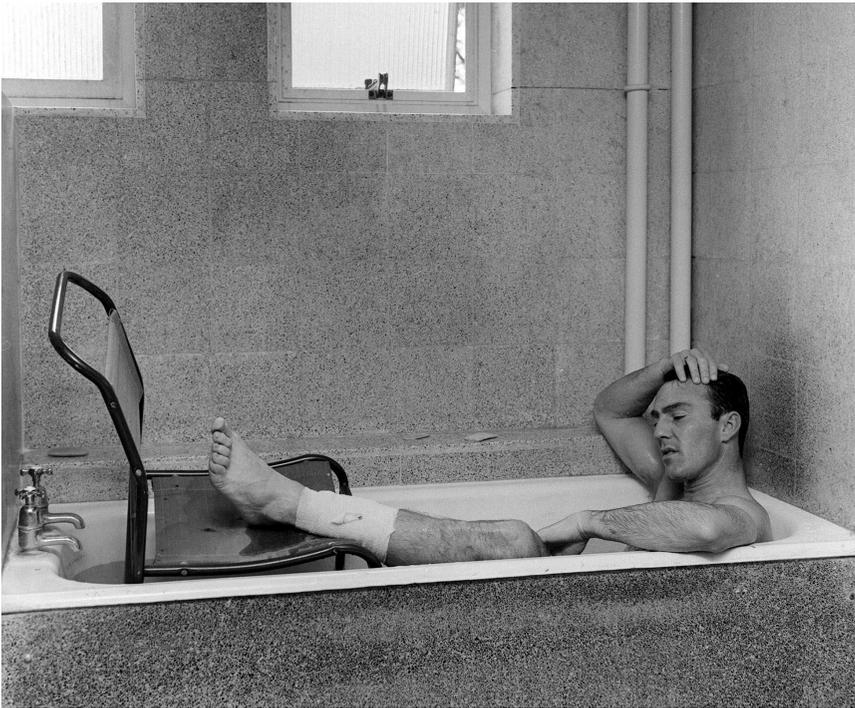
Let homage be rendered to the various sports, and in particular to football. For, still more than the king of sports, football is the king of games. (Jean Giraudoux)

English people of a certain age may well remember where they were when England won the World Cup on 30 July 1966.<sup>1</sup> During the preparation and writing of this book I have informally heard a number of firsthand memories in this regard, both from people I know, and people I have met in passing.<sup>2</sup> In each case the memory of seeing the World Cup Final, mostly on television, was recalled with such apparent vividness to confirm my belief, held from the outset, that this is a topic well worthy of thoroughgoing academic attention. Fifty years on, this may not be the only book by an academic published in 2016 on England's World Cup victory, but it is likely to be the only one written by someone over the age of fifty-five who did not watch the match at the time. In July 1966 I was eight years old and, while the World Cup Final was being played at Wembley Stadium, I was asleep in my bed at home in the early hours of a western Sydney morning. Had I been able to watch the match, I may well have done so. Attending state schools with a significant number of fellow students from the diversity of European migrant communities residing in my neighbourhood, I developed an interest in the sport we referred to as soccer from a fairly young age. I have my own memories – perhaps more hazy than vivid, but certain enough to remark upon – of standing around in the schoolyard discussing the replays of either *Match of the Day* or *The Big Match* on local television. As it was only these broadcasts of football from abroad that we got to see on a weekly basis, for an Australian child, becoming a soccer fan meant developing a keen interest in the English League.

I have no memory of first hearing about England winning the World Cup in 1966. It just seems to have lodged within my awareness, at a formative stage, as an accepted fact of football history. This taken for granted understanding was accompanied by an assumption that winning the World Cup would involve a fairly uncomplicated response of national pride for English people. Facile views of this kind came under challenge once I took up studying sport seriously,

yet the example of the 1966 World Cup did not return to my attention until I started living and working in Britain as an academic in the 1990s. When it came to my attention it did so as a matter of surprise. The surprise was not so much to read academic criticism of England's victory being manipulated for ideological and commercial reasons, but journalistic criticism of the victory itself, based on dissatisfaction with the way in which the England team had gone about playing football. Of related surprise was seeing depictions of the England manager, Sir Alf Ramsey, as a figure of ridicule. I remembered seeing photographs in my childhood and youth of Ramsey as a distinguished looking and understandably proud man.<sup>3</sup> That his popular image in England did not necessarily match to that which I had assumed for him became a matter of intrigue that festered away for some time and has now taken shape as a point of inquiry in this book. I now understand the reasons why some mock the persona of Ramsey, although, like his biographer Leo McKinstry, I think the representations are based in snide caricature.<sup>4</sup> However, rather than the primary interest here being in defending Ramsey's image, it is in understanding how his caricaturing connects to criticism of the circumstances surrounding England's winning of the World Cup in 1966. If there is a key protagonist in this book, then it is Ramsey. Criticisms of England's World Cup victory are so closely tied to him that he demands more than the already considerable attention he would receive in a study of this topic. A central argument in my book is that criticism of Ramsey, for the style of football he had England play in the 1966 World Cup, fails to recognise that he was a modernist in a way not unrelated to art. His innovation to playing strategy has not been denied, but references to him 'modernising' football tend to regard him as a ruthless technocrat devoid of aesthetic sensibility. The case presented here suggests otherwise and is intended to free Ramsey from an association with sterile scientific management.

The one particular episode that supposedly highlights Ramsey's lack of appreciation for the aesthetics of football is his exclusion of the virtuoso player Jimmy Greaves from the World Cup Final team. Ramsey's treatment of Greaves offers an indictment that no critic of the England manager can miss. From the outset of the World Cup finals tournament Greaves looked an uncomfortable fit within the playing 'system' Ramsey had developed. However, Greaves's undeniable goal-scoring potential secured his selection in the England team for the three Group stage games. In the last of these games, against France, Greaves sustained a laceration to his left leg that put him on the injury list for at least the next game, the quarter-final against Argentina. A photograph shows a despondent and solitary Greaves in the bathtub after the match, his bandaged leg rested on a chair to elevate it above the water. Upon seeing this image I was reminded of Jacques-Louis David's painting, *The Death of Marat*, in which the assassinated French revolutionary leader lies prone in his bathtub just seconds after taking his last breath.<sup>5</sup> David was an ally of Marat and the painting depicts



1 A dejected Jimmy Greaves in the bathtub ponders the implications of his leg injury.

Marat's martyrdom to the revolutionary cause. We cannot assume an ambition for the photograph of Greaves at the time it was taken, but can now see it as prescient of Greaves's fall from favour under Ramsey in the England team and, even as a first step towards his declining fortunes in club football. The injury sidelined Greaves for both the quarter-final against Argentina and the semi-final against Portugal. He was declared fit for the Final against West Germany, but Ramsey preferred to stick with Geoff Hurst, the player who had replaced Greaves for the games against Argentina and Portugal. Journalists debated ahead of the Final as to whether or not Greaves should return to the team at the expense of either Hurst or the other forward player Roger Hunt. With England going on to win the World Cup, one might assume the matter to be settled in admission that Ramsey made the correct decision. However, this has not been so. With the passing of time the World Cup win has become incidental to the critics' bigger concern over the Greaves absence from the England team symbolising the death of English football in 1966 and, in this light, the image of Greaves in the bathtub becomes all the more poignant.<sup>6</sup>

The creatively gifted Greaves appeared to provide a link with the best of a heroic past that Ramsey was willing to overlook in his single-minded quest to have England win the Jules Rimet trophy. But Greaves was no old-fashioned hero. He was a hero well-suited to the bright lights of the 1960s. He appealed to a 'modern romantic' sensibility of the time. His face was prominent in commercial advertisements in newspapers and magazines, giving him a celebrity profile that extended beyond football. Greaves's orientation to life and football was the diametrical opposite of Ramsey's. Ramsey was uninterested in and wary of activities extraneous to football. He believed professional football players should be fully focussed on football and, if they were, there was time for little else. Ramsey's modern outlook applied only to football. In other ways he was quite traditionally English. This may seem at odds with claiming Ramsey as a modernist, but not when considered in relation to Alexandra Harris's compelling thesis on the tendency for English modernists to retain romantic attachments to idealised aspects of English life.<sup>7</sup> Ramsey did just this and, like the writers, architects, designers and artists Harris discusses, he too may be regarded as a 'romantic modern'.

In a country where modernism has struggled to gain popular appeal – especially in architecture – it is not so surprising that the sharp-lined geometry of Ramsey's playing 'system' has had its critics. Remarks about the aesthetics of football being made via seemingly exclusive reference to a romanticised 'beautiful game', suggest little appreciation for the type of football that Ramsey fostered. Ramsey's preoccupation with winning the World Cup has also been a sign, for some, of his lack in aesthetic vision. Yet I would argue that the unswerving ambition to win the tournament provided the framework within which his aesthetic vision was developed. Baudelaire predicted the modernist aesthetic in art when he wrote of the possibility of beauty residing in 'the essential quality of being the present'.<sup>8</sup> Ramsey understood this in relation to football. He did so because he understood the very nature of football as a modern activity, circumscribed by the present, in terms of 'seasons' and tournaments. I argue that the playing 'system' developed by Ramsey to win the 1966 World Cup was guided by an aesthetic awareness of related functionalist priority and that the result is comparable to a constructivist art project. This may present a challenge to more conventional ways of seeing football, but, for that, no apology should need to be made.



England's winning of the 1966 World Cup makes for a rather different book than one that would have involved a discussion of England hosting the World Cup finals without its national team going on to win the Jules Rimet trophy.<sup>9</sup> Inevitably, in an academic book concerned with questions related to English identity, the implications of the World Cup victory become the focus of enquiry.

This becomes most explicit in the final chapters of this book as discussion turns to themes of memory – how the World Cup win is remembered, commemorated and, indeed, criticised. Discussion of the World Cup Final on 30 July 1966 occurs, in one way or another, in all chapters. Discussion of the World Cup finals, as an overall event, occurs in the first two full-length chapters as well as a later chapter concerned with locating the World Cup tournament coming to England within the cultural mood of the mid-1960s. This discussion is thankfully spared the contemporary demand for referring to football World Cup finals as mega-events. ‘Mega-event’ was not on the terminological radar in the 1960s and a now quaint term such as tournament still seems to suffice as a descriptor of the World Cup as an event in 1966.

Prominent within the lexicon of jargon that accompanies ‘mega-events’ is the term ‘legacy’. Promising a ‘legacy’ is now a core component of any city’s bid to host the Olympic Games, and the assessment of post-Games’ legacy delivery has emerged as an academic cottage industry. Compared to the Olympic Games, World Cup ‘legacy management’ is still at an early stage of development.<sup>10</sup> In 1966 there was no requirement for a legacy plan to be set out in advance. Legacy, without being explicitly referred to at the time, came on to the agenda in regard to the expectations accompanying government funding of stadia improvements ahead of the World Cup. This issue is discussed in Chapter 3. Apart from this understanding of legacy, it can also be considered in relation to unexpected outcomes from the 1966 World Cup. As such, legacy pertained to matters either directly related to football or to off-field events. A controversy that occurred in the Final provides an example of the former. Disputation remains to this day as to whether or not the ball actually crossed the line for England, and whether Geoff Hurst was rightly awarded the goal granted to them by referee Dienst in the first half of extra time. As such, the incident has provided a legacy by way of its influence to subsequent debates over the usage of goal line technology in international football. An off-field example of legacy relates to what can reasonably be recalled as the 1966 World Cup’s most unusual sideshow occurrence. In March 1966, the Jules Rimet trophy was stolen from a rare stamp exhibition at Westminster Central Hall, where it was on display as publicity for the forthcoming World Cup finals tournament. In a happening of incredibly good fortune, which rescued the Football Association (FA) from extreme embarrassment, the trophy was found by Pickles the dog while out walking with his owner David Corbett in their south London neighbourhood. Pickles earned a sizeable reward for Mr Corbett and, for himself, an invitation to the celebration banquet following the World Cup Final.<sup>11</sup> The legacy of the episode was a lesson in the need for greater security. The FA commissioned the making of a replica trophy that was used for public exhibition purposes with the real trophy being kept under lock and key until the conclusion of

the tournament. Despite greater care with security being taken over the years, the Jules Rimet trophy was again stolen, seemingly for good, in Brazil in 1983.<sup>12</sup>

In broadest intention *England and the 1966 World Cup* is offered as a contribution to the academic study of English cultural life. I maintain a long-held view that sport is a 'form' of culture and for this reason warrants scholarly attention. In *The Making of Sporting Cultures* I argued that some sports are so prominent within particular national contexts that they require mentioning in any reference to the 'common culture' of those nations. Accordingly, I so identified football within an English common culture.<sup>13</sup> This understanding underpins my interest in the subject matter of the present book. The theme of football and an English common culture is addressed most obviously in the next chapter and it remains influential to the discussion in other chapters throughout the book. A focus on the English experience of the World Cup leaves little room for attention to how the World Cup in England was experienced by other participant nations, not only the teams and supporters that visited in 1966, but supporters who observed the World Cup from abroad. There are a host of studies that could be written, and hopefully the approaching fiftieth anniversary year will serve as a prompt to scholars with the requisite language skills and access to vernacular materials to undertake such work.<sup>14</sup> Historical research is necessarily ambitious. According to Raymond Williams:

It is only ... our own time and place that we can expect to know, in any substantial way. We can learn a great deal of the life of other places and times, but certain elements, it seems to me, will always be irrecoverable ... The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living.<sup>15</sup>

Williams's modest approach to 'cultural history' remains influential to the study undertaken for and presented in this book. The related challenge has been to connect the 1966 World Cup in England to what Williams refers to as the 'structure of feeling' relevant to a given place and time. In this case it has required dealing with certain mythologies, such as the 'Swinging Sixties', not in a dismissive but a negotiated way, in an attempt to understand how the World Cup has been the subject of intertwining interpretations between reality and imagination. Although records and materials from a time do not reveal hidden truths, examination of them remains pertinent to meaningful cultural historical analysis and being able to verify matters as much as possible. In this belief I have consulted a number of archival repositories during the course of researching this book, the archive of the National Football Museum being especially significant, given its holdings of primary documentation relevant to the topic. Material accessed in the British Newspaper Archive, the British

Library and the Liverpool Records Office (the Everton Collection) has also been indispensable to the research.

The book's bibliography reveals, at a glimpse, an eclectic use of written material ranging from scholarly to popular publications. This is now familiar practice for research straddling old boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture and will surprise few readers. Some may, though, balk upon seeing the listing of a number of football player autobiographies, a genre proposed by David Goldblatt to be of the most 'debased literary currency'.<sup>16</sup> However, as tedious as some of the yarns may be, player autobiographies are valuable to historical research because they offer an insider's subjective reflection upon the particular sporting milieu the researcher is investigating.<sup>17</sup> Due to the fame afforded by the 1966 World Cup victory, a number of England players had autobiographies published within a few years of the tournament. Most have also had autobiographies published after or towards the end of their playing careers. The way in which recollections differ or emphases are made between two autobiographies written by the same player becomes a point of interest in this study. In most cases, if not all, the player autobiographies cited in the bibliography have been ghost written by football journalists. In cases where this has been declared on the title page, I cite the ghost writer in the respective entry. In cases where a ghost writer is not clearly acknowledged, the footballer is cited as sole author of his autobiography.

As much as I am interested in football-related information about the 1966 World Cup, I do not in this book systematically set out tournament- and match-related details in a manner that might be expected of a more descriptive historical account. For such details the *World Cup Report* by Harold Mayes, commissioned by the Football Association, remains the official reference source. Of internet sites available at the time of publication, England Football Online [www.EnglandFootballOnline.com](http://www.EnglandFootballOnline.com) provides a useful reference source for information pertaining to the England team at the 1966 World Cup.

This brief introductory chapter is followed by seven full-length chapters and then a brief concluding chapter, which considers the commemoration of England's World Cup victory. The chapters proceed thematically. Chapter 2 opens the encounter between post-war modernity and tradition, by examining the relationship between the World Cup and the FA Cup. The particular reason for looking at the relationship between the two is to understand how the World Cup victory was able to acquire such importance within a national context and football culture in which the World Cup competition struggled to gain significance. The symbolic conferment of prestige upon the World Cup by Queen Elizabeth II – like that given to the FA Cup – is seen as crucial to the cultural signification process. Politics of a cruder kind are discussed in

Chapter 3. Prime Minister Harold Wilson seemed to have little idea about the World Cup in the year prior to the finals coming to England, but by the time of England's victory he was so drawn to the golden glow of the Jules Rimet trophy as to create a 'legacy' for the way in which politicians would regard the World Cup into the future. His Government provided some funding for infrastructure and became involved in planning ahead of the tournament. The chapter addresses hosting issues and adopts a case study approach by focussing on Liverpool and Goodison Park. The concentrated study draws on a range of materials to provide insight into the cultural particularity of Liverpool's hosting experience.

Although somewhat mythologised, the mid-1960s was, nevertheless, a time of considerable change in social and cultural identity. Traditional masculinity was undoubtedly affected by the emergent rock'n'roll era. Football was not especially quick to respond, but the young men moving through its professional ranks could hardly ignore the behaviour of peers in other fields. The England squad in 1966 did not contain any players in the Beatlesque guise of George Best, and even its younger members have been regarded as conservatively conformist. Chapter 4 examines the masculinity of the 1966 England team via a parallel analysis of the masculinity of Alf Ramsey. Consideration of the complicated organisational circumstances which surrounded the players and, in particular, Ramsey, gives caution against accepting simplistic assessments of the manager and his players as embourgeoised establishmentarians. Ramsey was certainly not conventional or unoriginal when it came to playing tactics and strategy. The case for Ramsey being a football modernist, foreshadowed in the first part of this chapter, is developed and set out in chapter 5. This is possibly the most provocative chapter in the book. Its argument may or may not find favour with readers, but it should at least reopen the discussion of Ramsey and encourage an alternative consideration of his football tactics to that which presently predominates in relevant literature and discourse. Understandably, the World Cup does not tend to be regarded as an event that has offered much culturally beyond the football. Culturally related discussion has mostly favoured a populist imagining of the World Cup occurring against the colourful backdrop of swinging mid-1960s' England. Stereotypes notwithstanding, related considerations are relevant to more serious study and this is part of the story taken up in Chapter 6. Apart from pop culture associations the chapter also examines the cultural creativity directly sponsored by the World Cup, including posters, stamps, World Cup Willie the mascot and *Goal!*, the World Cup film. In differing ways each of these items offered something distinct, leaving (dare we say) a unique cultural legacy.

The final three chapters reflect upon the World Cup that was. Scholarly attention has, reasonably enough, been concerned with criticising ongoing celebratory representations of England's victory within the mass media. A number

of academics refer to a 'myth of 1966', which they claim presents a glorious tale of England's victory, minus consideration of queries that might disturb a praiseful narrative of linkage back to a lost Albion. The logical extension for some is that the World Cup win is successfully deployed by the media to bolster popular adherence to a nationalistic ideology beneficial to both capitalist and politically conservative interests. In critique of these views, Chapter 7 offers an against the grain reading of evidence used by academics in their arguments. I suggest that the determined effort to be critical has resulted in a counter bias, involving, in some instances, a selective interpretation of events. I also contend that the public response to the so-called 'myth of 1966' risks being overstated in two ways. Firstly, in presumption that the public readily buy into media discourse on the World Cup victory and, secondly, that subsequent football-related festivities drawing on 1966-related imagery are necessarily an expression of the type of nationalistic sentiment assumed by critics. A notion of 'collective memory' underpins belief in the existence of a shared public view of historical episodes, such as England's World Cup victory. Chapter 8 moves into a dedicated discussion of how we grapple to make sense of memory in this way, even to query the possibility and usefulness to talk meaningfully of a collective memory. A concern is that individual memories, and their significance, are subsumed by efforts to build a bigger memory map. Accordingly, this chapter gives voice to 'autobiographical memories' of the 1966 World Cup Final. Given the dearth of primary field-based research, use is made of memory statements provided in the non-academic volume *Voices of '66*. The statements raise themes that could be drawn out in a more focussed and substantial oral history research project. The latter half of the chapter switches attention to autobiographical memories of the World Cup Final provided within fictional texts. Here we see rare evidence, allegorical perhaps, of the World Cup Final as a milestone moment in personal lives and as a connecting point in generational relationships.

Popular pessimism has it that England may never again host a World Cup finals tournament or its national men's team win a World Cup Final, wherever it might be played. Whatever the future may ultimately bring in these regards, it does seem fair to say that hosting and/or winning the men's football World Cup will be some way off for England. Resignation to the inevitability of future failure has gained momentum in tabloid forums as each year passes since the 1966 World Cup victory. Such resignation betrays the double-edged pessimism over England's World Cup prospects, whereby England's unlikelihood to ever win the World Cup again is believed as a denial of true destiny. However, the view taken in this book is that commemoration need not be given over to historical negativity. I believe it best to regard the 1966 World Cup and England's winning of its Final as a 'moment in modernity'. This is not to suggest a freezing in time, but a belief in the importance of understanding episodes within

their own present. The concluding chapter recommends such an approach to the commemoration of the cultural significance of the 1966 World Cup in 'public memory' projects such as museum exhibitions. This book has been completed in the year ahead of the fiftieth anniversary year of the occasion, its publication timed to coincide with that golden anniversary. However, *England and the 1966 World Cup* is intended as more than an anniversary volume. I dare to imagine these very words being read in some years to come from this moment, and that you, the reader, will be encouraged to read on. If its pages can provide something of a 'felt sense' for the 1966 World Cup, within the cultural life of its 'particular place and time', then my ambition will have been fulfilled.

### Notes

- 1 Clarke and Critcher, '1966 and All That'.
- 2 This chapter is written in the first person voice to offer a personal tone to the book's introduction. A more conventional third person voice is used in subsequent chapters throughout the book.
- 3 The photographs I got to see of Ramsey would have been in books about sport and boy's annuals kept in my school library. Such books and football magazines, like *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly*, would have been a key source of information about football for young people in Britain (mainly boys, given the gendered presentation of the publications) during the mid-1960s. The following excerpt from *The Boys' Book of Soccer 1966*, observing the World Cup victory, is typically respectful: 'England's display in winning the World Cup was a personal triumph for Alf Ramsey, their team manager, who planned it for three years. Dedicated to the game and to his players and impervious to all criticism, he moulded eleven individuals into a team, decided its tactics and brought the side to its peak fitness at just the right moment.' See Smith, 'England's Victory in the World Cup', p. 16.
- 4 The biographies by McKinstry (*Sir Alf*) and Bowler (*Winning Isn't Everything*) provide fair, while not uncritical, accounts of Ramsey's life and career in football. McKinstry's book benefits from privileged access to materials related to Ramsey held by Ipswich Town Football Club, where Ramsey was manager from 1955 to 1963. The only autobiographical work by Ramsey is *Talking Football*, published in 1952 towards the end of his time as a player.
- 5 *The Death of Marat (La Mort de Marat)* is located in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts Belgium, Brussels.
- 6 Greaves claims that he knew straight after the match against France that the leg injury would end his chances of playing again in the World Cup. He accepted that should the team advance to the Final without him, then Ramsey would be quite right to retain the successful line-up for the Final. See Greaves, *The Heart of the Game*, pp. 36–7. However, Greaves's defence of Ramsey's decision has tended to be double-edged. For example, he has also claimed, without explicit reference to Ramsey, that the injury against France 'provided the excuse for my exit from the tournament'. See Greaves, *This One's on Me*, p. 22.

- 7 Harris, *Romantic Moderns*.
- 8 Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', p. 391.
- 9 An appropriate distinction is made within contemporary scholarship between men's and women's national football teams and respective tournaments. However, as an official England women's team was not formed until the early 1970s and the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) Women's World Cup was inaugurated in 1991, the England national team and the World Cup competition are referred to throughout this book without gender distinction being made and references can, accordingly, be taken to mean the England men's national football team and the FIFA World Cup played by men.
- 10 Horne, 'Managing World Cup Legacy', p. 9.
- 11 For a thoroughgoing study of the episode see Atherton, *The Theft of the Jules Rimet Trophy*. Pickles went on, later in the year, to star in the comedy film *The Spy with a Cold Nose*. Sadly, he is reported to have died while chasing a cat in 1967.
- 12 When Brazil won the World Cup in 1970, a prerogative for a third-time competition winning country was exercised and the Jules Rimet trophy remained from then, until its disappearance, in the care of the Brazilian Football Federation. The replica trophy commissioned by the FA is one of the 1966 World Cup related items displayed at the National Football Museum, Manchester. Pickles' collar is also on display at the museum.
- 13 Hughson, *The Making of Sporting Cultures*.
- 14 For a current example of such research, see Meyer's essay on reportage and interpretation of the controversial third England goal from the 1966 World Cup Final. Meyer, 'Erecting a European Lieu de Mémoire'.
- 15 Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 47.
- 16 This phrase has been attributed to Goldblatt in a number of web-based citations. David Goldblatt has confirmed in personal correspondence to the author (7 July 2015) that he used this description of footballer autobiographies at a 'conference in Toronto in 2009'.
- 17 A similar point about the value of sportsperson autobiographies to historical research is made by Taylor, 'From Source to Subject', p. 485–6.