Work, self and the transformation of identity

A sociological study of the careers of professional footballers

By

Martin Roderick

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

Department of Sociology
University of Leicester

September, 2003

UMI Number: U601123

UMI

Dissertation Publishing

UMI U601123

ProQuest

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank sincerely the following people who have contributed to the completion of this thesis.

First, I would like to offer my utmost gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Ivan Waddington. More than anyone, his wealth of sociological knowledge has been invaluable for me whilst undertaking the research and throughout the writing-up process. While Ivan has been my principle influence, it would be improper to isolate him from *our* colleagues at the former Centre for Research into Sport and Society, all of whom showed interest continually or helped in more substantive ways. Of these, Sharon Colwell, Dominic Malcolm, Lisa Heggs, and Professor Eric Dunning provided support ceaselessly throughout the research by reading early drafts of chapters and, most important of all perhaps, through their encouragement.

Other than my supervisor, Ivan Waddington, the only other person who has read all of the chapters herein is my wife, Lucy. Her help was necessary for there were many occasions when I needed reassurance and other times when I needed to be left alone to think and write. Lucy tiptoed round our home nearly always with good humour. I am indebted to her in so many ways.

Finally, I would like to thank all the players who gave up their time, and agreed to be interviewed. Any achievements that accrue from this study are due, in large measure, to their honesty during our encounters.

Abstract

The traditional focus for sociologists studying occupations has been on manual workers in the main as their work is assumed to be laborious and unimaginative, yet footballers are almost never considered in this way despite the immensely physical nature of their work. Far from tedious, their job, by contrast, is thought of as a *labour of love*. This study is an interactionist analysis of the careers of male professional footballers in England, which provides sociological insights into the realities of their working lives.

Professional football is a contingent and highly physical form of employment. Players' careers may be terminated involuntarily as a result of a severe injury. It is a short-term vocation in which ageing inevitably reduces physical capital. Professional football is characterised by an extremely competitive labour market, for there is an oversupply of aspirants 'chasing the big-time'.

This qualitative study is based on data obtained via semi-structured interviews with forty-seven present and former professional footballers. The central theme of this thesis concerns an understanding of the ways in which the orientations of players to their work change over the course of their careers. The players were asked about turning points in their work histories, such as long-term injuries, transfers from one club to another, and other key moments in which they felt uncertain about what their futures may hold. In part, the focus of the interviews concerned the subjective meanings the players impute to their experiences. An examination of the *drama* of work is undertaken. The ways in which players deal with the workplace insecurities that are an inbuilt characteristic of their occupation are examined and an explanation of why they continue to pursue a career in the professional game, despite developing cynical attitudes towards their work and their employers, is attempted.

Introduction

Since the development of the professional game in the nineteenth century, professional footballers have been heroes for people worldwide. In newspapers and magazines globally there is a vast amount written each week of each football season about professional football and the players, most of which emphasises the glamour of the game and the dramatic and decisive moments on the pitch (Gearing, 1997). It would be difficult to argue against the notion that professional football is a relatively prestigious occupation. Many supporters of the game would not hesitate to describe the work of professional footballers as a 'labour of love'. Gearing (1999) suggests that they are 'immersed in an occupational world of intense emotionality and drama', and he goes on to remark that 'the sheer excitement and intensity can lift players out of the everyday world into a kind of high octane, intoxicating existence' (p.47). For many people worldwide too, supporting their team is a very important aspect of their lives. However, despite the enormous amount of attention paid to players, most of which debates levels of performance, there has been relatively little scrutiny of their working lives and how they cope with the 'authoritarianism, ruthlessness and hyper-masculine workplace practice(s)' (Parker, 1996a, p.1) of the football world. Over the last twenty-five years, academic analysis of football has focused overwhelmingly on the issue of hooliganism (King, 1999). The study of players and their work by sociologists has been marginal at best. Some academics, for example King (1999), have written about *the sociology of football* and neglected totally to mention players. This marginalisation is, perhaps, unusual since *work* and how it is organised and experienced is central among the traditional concerns of sociologists. The careers of professional footballers will be examined in this thesis in an attempt to add to knowledge in this neglected area.

In the introduction to his classic study, *The Glory Game*, Hunter Davies (1996) suggests that players find it difficult to comprehend the unexpected events which, in part, change the course of their careers, such as a loss of form and confidence, and the accidents and ill-luck which befall them. If their playing careers can be conceptualised as a status passage (Strauss, 1962) involving a series of formal and

informal positions (e.g., apprentice, young professional, senior professional, retired professional), then such events can be considered turning-points or fateful moments which may change the trajectory of their career-paths. In terms of understanding their working lives sociologically, it is important to examine the occasions which significantly alter the course of a career, and how players retrospectively consider such fateful events. Two examples taken from the player interviews conducted for this study may help to explain the significance of these kinds of occasions.

A young Division Three player who had been watched regularly by a number of scouts from clubs in higher divisions had broken his collarbone at a time when he was expecting a firm offer to be placed. In his interview, which took place eight years later, this player said that, since this time, he did not think that an opportunity to make such a step-up in playing standard had ever presented itself. For this player, the injury that he suffered was a turning point of some significance. His injury marked the beginning of a passage of time in which he was forced to sit and watch his colleagues playing. Yet, while he was looking on and reflecting on what might have been, other players took his place in the team and attempted to take this opportunity to establish themselves as first team regulars.

Other occasions that also mark the beginning of a passage of change for players are transfers to other teams. A former senior professional with a Division One club, for example, recounted how in the 1998-99 season he had turned down a renewed and improved offer from his club situated in the North of England in favour of a move South to a lower division club. He said his decision to move South was motivated by the death of his father; simply put, he wanted his family to move so they could be nearer to his mother. In the subsequent two seasons as a player for this Division Two club, the club directors appointed five new managers. The fifth manager, in the view of this player, did not consider him crucial to his future plans for the team, and he eventually left to play for a semi-professional team in the Southern League; he was pushed, unjustifiably he thought, at a time when he was still able to do a good job for the team. However, the Northern team for which he had originally turned down an improved contract had won promotion

to the Premier League. So, while his career had in his view plummeted, he had witnessed (somewhat enviously) many of his former colleagues at the Northern club develop national and international reputations. For this player, his career decision to transfer to the southern club was significant. Even though he knew he had moved for the right reasons, his reputation as an established Division One player had nevertheless been wiped out in a relatively short period and, at his age (33 years), it was unlikely that he would be able to return to the professional game.

The point of drawing attention to such events in the careers of these two players is to highlight the significance of key occurrences that set in motion unexpected changes in the career trajectories of players. There are, one might argue, consequences for the decisions made by players to which, at the time, they are blind. Momentous occasions, however, are features of the 'careers' and working lives of all people in one way or another; they are not solely the preserve of professional footballers. Yet, while no one can be sure of their career paths in advance, the career decisions for most employees do not get discussed and evaluated publicly. One crucial characteristic of the work situation for professional footballers is the highly public nature of their 'performance'.

Footballers, like many other public figures are subject to close scrutiny by an audience who claim a degree of expertise (or who have a perception that they have knowledge) of the field. What is more, this audience pays for the privilege of voicing an opinion. In professional football, 'mistakes at work' are closely watched by fans, judged by outsiders, broadcast on, and published regularly in, the mass media. Professional footballers are losing the battle to retain control over the setting of the standards by which they are judged; and this, perhaps, is why professional football clubs remain so 'closed' to outsiders. Other conflictual situations may arise, for example, from differences between players who strive for economic success (or stability) and those who seek personal fulfilment, club owners who are concerned with team success and club profits, and managers who strive, among other tasks, to blend players into a winning combination while maintaining the loyalty of all members of the squad. In the course of this research, the focus will be on career contingencies such as those discussed thus far,

examining the processes by which interaction unfolds, the meaning which particular experiences have for players, the problematic and negotiable dimensions of a working life in a professional team sport, and how players work out these activities with each other.

Thus, the sociological problem that lies at the heart of this study involves an examination of the way in which professional footballers cope with the problems of specific forms of social interdependence which they experience throughout their careers. Players perform their work in teams yet there are among them high levels of internal competition for places. This fact remains with players throughout their relatively short-term careers. Coping with this problem is something that they all have to address. It is a problem that comes to an end only when they retire from the professional game. Every time a player deals with one such problem, for instance a loss of form or an injury which leads them to be omitted from the starting line-up, they hit upon other problems themselves and create new problems for others. In this respect, the career contingencies encountered by all players are created in part by their interdependence but must be understood as in flux; they are unavoidable and constantly (re)occurring.

The problems encountered by players in the course of their careers are largely unplanned and unintended. When players start out they may think that, as young professionals, their destinies are in their hands (or, perhaps, feet!). Yet, as they mature, they find themselves increasingly caught up in ties of interdependence which they cannot comprehend very easily, if at all (Elias, 1978). Players attribute injuries, particularly those which lead them to miss matches, and poor performances by themselves or by their team collectively, to a constellation of depersonalised forces, particularly 'bad luck' (Gowling, 1974). Only slowly do they come to understand that people – that is, other people as well as themselves – exert the constraints within which they labour. The very same players who may feel compelled to perform, perhaps carrying an injury or (having been dropped from the first-team) in the reserves, are at the same time actively exerting pressure on those around them with whom they are enmeshed. However, it must not be forgotten that players have also to be understood as exercising pressure on themselves as much as on other people.

One of the central problems to be addressed in this study thus concerns the on-going nature of the careers of players. It is, that is to say, the problem of conceptualising developments on an individual or personal level, processes which always take place within the context of wider social nexuses which are, themselves, also processes. While the focus for players during interviews may have been, in part, on individual – albeit fateful and momentous – events such as a bad injury or rejection by a manager, such occasions must be understood as inseparable from the development of their working-lives as professional footballers just as these are inseparable from the development of professional football overall. Players continually attempt to orientate themselves within the social networks in which they are bound up in the hope of dealing or coping better with the problems that continually arise.

Thesis structure

This thesis will take the following structure. In **Chapter One** I examine the variety of definitions of career as used by sociologists, review the literature within the sociology of careers and make some preliminary comments about the careers of professional footballers. This discussion leads to **Chapter Two** in which I set out and justify the interactionist framework that was employed to organise and interpret the research data. This chapter also contains an account of how the research was carried out. Throughout the process of undertaking the interviews for this study and the subsequent periods of analysis and writing-up, the relationship between theoretical framework and methods was reflected upon specifically in terms of how one informs the other. In the light of the work of Elias (1978), I argue that there is an important two-way interplay between theory and the data relating to interviewees' perceptions of specific events in their lives. These first two chapters do not utilise the empirical data obtained from the primary research.

One of the central themes of this study concerns the orientations of players to their work. An important task I set myself at the outset was to examine whether, and if so how, the frame of mind of players changed over the course of their careers, and how such changes affected their attitudes to the professional game. Thus, in

Chapter Three, I describe, and offer some initial thoughts concerning, what constitutes a *good attitude* in professional football[1]. I examine also a number of circumstances and contexts in which the display of a good attitude is meaningful; for example, I focus on the tension between individual progress versus team success, and the management of injury. The respective attitudes and values of the players reflect the informal cultural norms – which stress the values of masculinity, active participation and victory – that may guide behaviour and feelings, and are an aspect of the taken-for-granted perspective in terms of how the game ought to be played and on how players are expected to conduct themselves. A number of the ideas examined in this chapter are emphasised throughout later chapters in this thesis, but particularly **Chapter Nine**.

Accidents and injuries are permanent features of professional football and they constantly threaten to terminate careers early. While football injuries are potentially fatal to a player's career, they are accepted as an inevitable feature of the professional game. The overwhelming majority of players will continue to play with pain and injury. In fact, playing with pain is accepted as a sign of vocational commitment. The sociological debate about injury more generally however has taken place primarily in the literature on industrial relations. In order to add to this body of work, in the next two chapters I examine the ways in which players deal with and experience the consequences of 'being' injured. Firstly, in **Chapter Four** I focus on the myriad uncertainties experienced by players and attempt to understand the ways in which they try to cope during these indeterminate periods of time. In **Chapter Five** I examine how players become, or perceive themselves as being, discredited and stigmatised by managers, physiotherapists or even players and attempt to understand how they – as players – contribute to these processes of discrediting. A point that is central to both these chapters is that accidents and injuries at work occur within, and are products of, networks of social relationships. Hence, injuries in the professional game are socially constructed, because a footballer will be expected to play tolerating a certain level of pain. Perhaps more than any of the other chapters that make up this thesis, Chapters Four and Five demonstrate the fragile and uncertain nature of the careers of professional footballers.

Labour market migration is a relatively rare event, however in the context of professional football simultaneous job and geographical relocation is becoming increasingly commonplace for players and, maybe, the members of their families. Footballers move regularly between cities and countries. Moreover, since the Bosman ruling in 1995, there has been increasing potential for global trade. Chapter Six is the first of three chapters all of which focus on the process of transferring. In **Chapter Six** I attempt to relate the process of transferring from one club to another, a clear punctuation mark in the onward-moving career of a player, to transformations of self-identity. In this chapter I examine the way in which a process of transferring may be initiated – the initial moments when players begin to recognise that they need to 'move on' – and what it means to a player to be transferred in terms of his sense of self. The focus of this chapter, therefore, concerns those socially patterned transformations that relate to, what in other occupations might be understood as, *promotion* and *demotion*. A sense of rejection which is experienced subjectively and transformations of identity more generally, are always the outcome of interaction with others. Thus, in **Chapter Seven** I examine the people to whom players turn for advice and support when, for example, they have been dropped from the first-team or when they are deliberating over transfer offers. In this chapter I look more closely at the mechanics of the process of transferring in terms of who speaks to whom, and where and when, and I explain how players develop informal friendship networks that may facilitate their movement between clubs.

The concept of control within the workplace has a long history in sociology, and there is a great deal written about forms of control initiated by management, and employee resistance to such initiatives. In **Chapter Eight** I address the problem of the relative power of players – as employees – in relation to the process of transferring. Thus, I set out, firstly, to understand who possesses greater or lesser ability to control the process of transferring. Secondly, I examine the nature and forms of this control. It is clear that some people enmeshed in these processes are, relatively speaking, more powerful than others. For example, football managers are able to exercise control over their players by virtue of their command over desired resources, which may equate not only to improved contracts, but also to opportunities to confirm playing status and build reputations. I argue in this

chapter that if one is to understand adequately the movement of players from one club to another, it is necessary to examine the dynamic balances of power among the network of interdependent relations which characterise professional football, including managers, club directors, club doctors, physiotherapists and the partners of players.

In **Chapter Nine** I examine the way in which players develop more realistic orientations to their 'work' *over time*. I examine how players come to realise that being a professional footballer is not, to quote one interviewee, all about 'appearances at Wembley'. In order to examine this idea I employ, in part, the concept of 'alienation' and ideas contained in the study, *The Fate of Idealism in Medical Schools* (Becker and Geer, 1958). While players rarely lose their ideals with regard to the 'playing-side' of the game, most with whom I spoke argued *cynically* that for them professional football has become, first and foremost, a way of making a living. I argue that the development of an increasing 'cynicism' is related to changing circumstances and events over time – for example, the experience of rejection and the process of transferring, long-term injuries, and 'proving' oneself to new managers. Thus, I examine the changing *orientations* of professional footballers to their work and why many older players come to refer to themselves as 'commodities', 'pieces of meat' and as 'just another number'. In the short **Conclusion**, I draw together a number of the key sociological ideas and themes raised throughout each of the chapters in this thesis.

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[1] Attitudes to football are examined closely in Chapter Three, although at this point it is enough to indicate that the whole notion of a professional attitude to the game remains largely undefined.

Chapter One

An introduction to the sociology of careers

Traditional definitions and usages

The concept 'career' has a myriad of uses, both sociologically and in everyday managerial jargon. The term is employed by many people in contemporary societies to attribute 'coherence, continuity, and social meaning to their lives' (Young and Collin, 2000). Weber and Mannheim were amongst the first sociologists to employ the term. For them, a career was linked to an occupation. Mannheim (1940) wrote that a career was a predictable course through a bureaucracy and Weber (1964), in particular, used the term to illuminate his discussions of the role of 'experts' within bureaucracies, that is, those people with expert knowledge. Generally speaking, the concept 'career' has been associated with the idea of a unilinear sequential progression through an occupation, usually one considered a 'profession', e.g., medicine, law, academia, finance, in the life course of an individual. As a rule, one does not speak of the career of a car mechanic, or of the career of a window cleaner because there is no clear or formalized ladder of recognized positions. The concept of career is fundamental to the sociology of occupations, but has also made significant contributions to the field of sociology in general.

Hall (1948), in a model (interactionist) study, discusses the stages of a medical career suggesting that 'medicine . . . is practiced in a network of institutions, formal organisations, and informal relationships' (p.327). Hall discerns a developmental *career pattern* through which individuals pass en route to identifying with the requirements of the role of doctor. One of the objects of Hall's study is to suggest that individuals are not simply 'doctors' in isolation, but that their becoming doctors involves them in a process of learning over a period of time, marked by a pattern or series of adjustments and turning points. Individuals must learn to behave as doctors should, for example, to foster relationships with other people as members of other groups, as patients or nurses or senior

colleagues, in order to justify their own, and others' expectations of what it is to be a doctor. Hall (1948) identifies a sequence of four characteristics, albeit hypothetical stages, of the medical career: '(i) the generating of an ambition; (ii) gaining admittance to the various medical institutions … ; (iii) acquiring a clientele … ; (iv) developing a set in informal relationships with colleagues … ' (p.327). This framework is not unique to medicine. Similar sequential models, which allow for change through time, have been employed by sociologists to investigate the 'careers' of railroaders, telephone workers, union leaders, teachers and 'athletes', as well as marijuana users and mental patients. The term given by sociologists to a sequence of stages such as the one examined by Hall is *career pattern* or *career structure*, and one says of people involved in a job like physician or lawyer, that they are involved in a *career*.

The view presented of the concept of career and career pattern so far has been narrow. In short it has been stated that a career is connected to an occupation, and consists of an orderly sequence of movements made by an individual in an upward direction, or from one position to another in an occupational system. However, some sociologists have redefined the concept to encompass far more than strictly occupational settings. The first section of this chapter will initially focus on sociological literature related to the concept 'career' in the broader sense. The second section will have occupational careers as its specific focus; that is, those careers and career patterns connected to 'work' or employment. The third section makes some preliminary comments about the careers of professional footballers.

Interactionism and the sociology of careers

For symbolic interactionists the concept of career need not be restricted to the long-term experiences of individuals through an occupational structure. Howard Becker (1963) for example wrote about the 'deviant career' of the marijuana user. Being a drug user is not, of course, an occupation. As Weir (1973) points out, 'pot smoking is not a job (at least, not yet)' (p.106). However, Becker's study of the career of the marijuana user highlights the commitment of individuals to identify progressively with the prerequisites of being a drug user. In his classic study, Becker (1963) transforms the term 'career', suggesting that it might be a 'useful

conception in developing sequential models of various kinds of deviant behaviour' (p.24). He outlined three stages through which an individual builds a stable pattern of deviant behaviour, and *becomes* a regular marijuana user. The developing sequential stages in the career include learning the techniques of inhalation to ensure that the drug is smoked 'properly'; learning to recognise the effects of the drug, i.e., of getting high; and, finally, learning to enjoy the effects or sensations of getting high. In a manner reminiscent of Hall, Becker (1963) developed the concept of career to enable him to understand any 'pattered series of adjustments made ... to the network of institutions, formal organisations and informal relationships' (p.102), within both the realm of work, and an individual's commitment to participate in the activities of a deviant subculture or, as Becker (1963) labelled them, 'outsider' groups.

In addition to his study of marijuana users, Becker (1963) analysed careers in a deviant *occupational* group, that of the dance musician. The significance of this study lies in the fact that although the activities of dance musicians are formally within the law, their habits and distinctive way of life are sufficiently unconventional for them to be thought of as 'outsiders' by more orthodox musicians. According to Becker, there exists a common desire amongst dance musicians to play 'jazz' music exclusively. Jazz is considered to be a principal method of gaining respect from other musicians, and consequently, of enhancing one's self-respect among one's contemporaries. However, in order to achieve success, and by this Becker is referring to financial stability, dance musicians find it necessary to ' "go commercial"; that is, to play in accord with the wishes of non-musicians for whom he [the musician] works' (p.83). For Becker, this is a common problem for workers in *service industries*. Becker (1963) continues:

> Service occupations bring together a person whose full-time activity is centred around the occupation and whose self is to some degree deeply involved in it, and another person whose relation to it is much more casual. . . Members of service occupations characteristically consider the client unable to judge the proper worth of the service and bitterly resent attempts on his part to exercise control over the work (p.82).

A number of points relevant to an understanding of the sociology of careers – and to the careers of professional footballers specifically – result from the work by Becker on dance musicians. Firstly, he adds to a widening of the concept by suggesting that a typical career does not always involve simple progress or advancement. Unlike many occupations in industry or in the white-collar sector, the dance musician does not identify with one employer, expecting to change jobs frequently. One's *career line*, under conditions such as these, might generate certain career contingencies and, sociologically speaking, add complications to the structure of the occupational career. Secondly, Becker highlights the relational constraints within which individuals live out their working lives, especially those associated with service industries. For example, he focuses on the problem for dance musicians of maintaining freedom from outside control over artistic behaviour, whilst concurrently attempting to achieve economic security. Thirdly, he calls into question the notion of what it is for one to have a 'successful career'. A dance musician can make regular money through a reliable self-generated network of formal and informal contacts, but may feel as though one has to sacrifice self-respect and the respect of other musicians in order to achieve this. Success for the dance musician may conflict with notions of success for the employer and audience.

Becker introduced and developed many sociological ideas concerning careers, but of particular relevance to this study are his introductory comments regarding a career within a *service industry*. Becker (1955) states that 'service occupations are, in general, distinguished by the fact that the worker in them comes into more or less direct and personal contact with the ultimate consumer of the product of his work, the client for whom he performs the service' (p.82). He feels that conflict is inherent in this performer-customer relationship and that problems which result from this conflict 'may be taken as a prototype of the problems deviants have in dealing with outsiders who take a different view of their deviant activities' (p.83). This is interesting for two reasons; firstly, it is quite possible that the 'interests' of the performer and the customer may be entirely different, and that the two have varying ideas of how the occupational service should be performed. The customer can bring pressure to bear on the performer in order to bring about a change in behaviour, or ultimately withdraw their patronage. A

change of behaviour of this nature, brought about by disagreement, might produce major turning points and crises in one's career and, in some cases, lead to career termination. Secondly, it sensitises one to the idea that when talking of a career, it is important to bear in mind the perspective from which it is considered. For example, despite the fact that throughout his or her career the dance musician may remain economically stable and 'in work', on reflection, a musician may feel disenchanted or disillusioned with his or her career, or worse still, experience feelings of failure. In this instance, the musician, as it were, is taking a retrospective view of their career. Goffman (1961) commented that the view constructed by an individual when looking back over their 'progress' is a very important aspect of every career.

Tausky and Dubin (1965) suggest that it is important for sociologists to understand when one is looking forwards or backwards. They suggest that the tendency to mark one's advancement by reference to a fixed point or goal which one hopes to obtain – given career contingencies – at some point in the future may be described as 'upward career anchorage' (p.726). By contrast, significant incidents from one's past which may elicit retrospectively a mixture of emotions, may be referred to as 'downwards career anchorage points'. However, Tausky and Dubin (1965) suggest that these polar anchorage points, used to evaluate one's career, should not be thought of as being mutually exclusive. It would make sense sociologically to suggest that at different points in their lives, individuals concurrently make plans to achieve particular goals, and also reflect upon past experiences. In fact, individuals on the basis of personal experience probably create many goals. Many interactionists, most prominently Hughes (1958), Becker (1956), Goffman (1961) and Weir (1973), have developed the study of careers in an attempt to understand the perspectives of the 'people' involved, i.e., their personal experiences or subjective feelings, as well as concentrating on patterned sequences of passage which are usually examined as though they existed separately from the people involved. To put it another way, a career might be looked at, objectively, from the perspective of a series of positions and/or statuses and clearly defined offices and, subjectively, in terms of something personally experienced, felt and evaluated by the individual (Hughes, 1958).

One of the most influential sociologists who focused on the sociology of occupations, and specifically examined the concept of career, was E. C. Hughes (1958) of the University of Chicago. Hughes's (1958) specific input was to define the concept 'career' as having both objective and subjective components (a point developed more fully by one of his students, Erving Goffman), and he makes four related points of some significance. Firstly, Hughes (1958) points out that careers are not restricted to the passage from one status to another within a job, and suggests that, 'it is possible to have a career in an avocation as well as a vocation' (p.64). His second point is that a career must be conceived of by sociologists as something which is constantly changing, and being re-evaluated by the individuals in their careers. One's outlook, according to Hughes, is revised in keeping with experience and, therefore, the concept of career must be understood as a process.

His third point is that the concept of career has both objective and subjective components. This aspect of his work marks perhaps one of the major turning points in the literature within the sociology of careers. Hughes (1958) departs in approach from previous studies, in which sociologists focused on a series of business or professional achievements, to one where a career is understood, in part, as, 'the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him. This perspective is not absolutely fixed either as to points of view, direction, or destination' (p.63). A study of careers necessarily focuses on typical stages or patterned sequences of events, be they for the bureaucrat, the religious activist, the footballer or the housewife. Hughes (1958) suggests, however, that similarly one is able to focus on a subjective or 'personal career' (p.67). The implication of this point is that it is not enough for sociologists to examine occupational patterns. A career must be understood as the exchanges between the individual and other people with whom they interact, as well as an individual's self-reflection on the past and present, albeit within bureaucratic structures. The final point drawn out from Hughes, and one that provides the basis for the major contribution by Goffman to the sociology of careers, is simply that 'no person becomes a moral person until he has a sense of his own station and the proper way to it' (p.56). In short, the study of a career involves understanding the networks of relationships within which people mix over time, which constrain them to accept

the requirements, or behave as though they accept the requirements, of a role within an institutional setting, as binding to them.

This is an idea developed by Goffman (1961) in his classic essay, 'The Moral Career of the Mental Patient'. In this work, Goffman (1961) attempts to examine sociologically the stages through which a person passes in a mental hospital. He focuses centrally on the symbolic interactionist notion of 'the self' in order to illustrate how a person must maintain particular outward impressions (or fronts) of themselves so as to achieve and maintain a *moral order* with those people around them. Consequently, individuals are bound to the roles which they create for themselves and, through this, other people develop expectancies, and feel justified in making moral demands of them in order to maintain a given moral order. The continued act of maintaining appropriate 'fronts' to which individuals are held by others, constitutes, for Goffman, a 'moral career'. Goffman (1961) defines a moral career as, 'the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person's self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others' (p.119). To develop his ideas, Goffman (1961) focuses on those people judged sick by psychiatric standards and who are hospitalised as a result. He illustrates how the role of 'mental patient' is particularly binding on those people who have been identified as mentally ill, and how, because of the expectancies of other people, it becomes a 'moral career' from which those individuals may find it difficult to break.

In his essay, Goffman (1961) sets out the two siddedness of the concept of career, suggesting:

> One side is linked to the internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations, and styles of life, and is the publicly accessible institutional complex. The concept career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, the self and its significant society, without having to rely overly for data upon what the person says he thinks he imagines himself to be (p.119).

And one might add, using Hughes's formulation, that this concept allows the sociologist to move back and forth between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' aspects of career. The idea of an 'internal' or 'subjective' side of an individual's personality is central to Goffman's interactionist approach, and he claims that the term 'career' can be used to refer to any social strand of any individual's course through life. Of great importance to an understanding of an individual's moral career, then, are the turning points, contingencies and situations which mark for an individual a change in the network of relationships with others, and therefore signal a re-evaluation of *self*. That is, as one's relations with other people start to change for whatever reasons, one begins to reflect on the impressions received by others of oneself, and of one's own view of oneself. One has a moral duty to present an image of oneself which is consistent with the behaviour anticipated by others, thereby maintaining a moral order. Abrams (1982) suggests that 'moral careers may vary in the extent to which they impose on and impel the identity of those who follow them' (p.283), but if a career is considered 'immoral' in the public domain, it will require from the person a greater level of commitment to the identity to achieve a convincing 'performance'.

Goffman (1961) suggests that at any given point in a individual's life course, but especially following times of transition or a turning point, individuals, by way of explaining their present circumstances to others, develop an image or view of themselves which can be verbally presented. This tale 'selects, abstracts and distorts' (p.139) the facts of the individuals past and present life, in order that they may relinquish responsibility for themselves from their present circumstances, both to others and to themselves. Such stories also have the task of re-aligning the individual with more appropriate or central moral values, thereby reducing the chances of affronting the sensibilities of others with whom they mix, whether or not others feel this need not to be affronted. This type of tale is called 'an apologia'. According to Goffman (1961), the more an individual feels that their past, present or future is out of step with the moral order, the more likely they are to develop and repeat their self-supporting 'sad tale' (p.140). This tendency to promote oneself in somewhat fantasy laden terms, or at least to twist the truth is, for Goffman (1961), 'heavily institutionalized within the patient society where opening social contacts typically involve the participants' volunteering

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information about their current ward location and length of stay so far, but not the reasons for their stay' (p.141). However, this tendency might have more general applicability within institutional settings where the organisation of formal and informal relationships is such that certain changes or specific turning points may be crucial for the individual's perception of their own 'career', life-course, or other specific career anchorage points.

At this juncture, a more general discussion may help to clarify what is meant by the concept 'moral career'. The first step in this discussion relates, perhaps, to the most fundamental of sociological problems, that of unifying individual biography and social history: of the personal and the public. When one reflects upon one's life-history, most experiences or recollections involve or relate to other people. So it is appropriate to suggest that one has a *social* biography in which, when one reflects retrospectively, one has grown, whether faster or slower, into an expanding network of social relationships. Sections of this social biography can be sub-divided arbitrarily into a series of specific careers, for example, an educational career or career as housewife, which, then, must be considered as changing over time. Therefore, sociological analyses of individual biographies or specific individual careers must focus on the idea of a temporally organised sequence. In short, what is being advocated is the need to understand 'the process of becoming' (Abrams, 1982, p.267); that is, *the process of becoming* a marijuana user or mental patient. However, to suggest that one must only identify or locate a career within an individual's social biography (or life history) would be limiting to one's 'historical' view.

It is suggested, by way of illustration, that the life history of a mental patient would look quite different if one was to compare social conditions for mental patients in the 18th century to those in the 20th century. Sociologically, the social construction of what it is to be mentally ill in psychiatric terms would probably vary considerably between these periods, and it would follow that the temporally organised sequence of stages to becoming a mental patient would also be different. Comparatively speaking, therefore, any differences between what constitutes 'moral' behaviour, or behaviour deemed appropriate 'by society', from one time period to the next, would be apparent. So studies of the process of

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becoming a mental patient would vary between historical periods. One might conclude that what seems to be important is not so much an individual life-history, but 'life history in the context of some specific social history' (Abrams, 1982, p.283). In other words, the study of moral careers is more adequately explained in terms of processes in two dimensions, that is, the intersection of life history and social history.

The concept of moral career, it is suggested here, has particular applicability to many other types of careers, most distinctively because it assists the sociologist's analysis of the extent to which the process of becoming is a socially structured process: that is, it shows how individual social biographies can be characteristic or typical of collectivities of people. It helps in determining the links between 'the process of becoming', the life history of the individual, and the historical timing of individual lives in the larger process of social history (Abrams, 1982, p.282).

Occupational Careers

The focus of this section is on *work* related careers. There is a considerable volume of literature related to occupational careers, most of which examines professionals and skilled workers. The bulk of the early literature on occupations and careers, commencing in the 1940s and 50s, was dominated by interactionist (ethnographic) accounts of individual occupations, firms or industries (Spilerman, 1983), which very often emphasised the *orderly* career progression among professionals: for example, the stages of a medical career (Hall, 1948), the professional dance musician (Becker, 1951), the career of the public school teacher (Becker, 1952), the occupational culture of the boxer (Weinburg and Arond, 1952), the career experiences of a symphony orchestra musician (Westby, 1960), the professional soldier (Janowitz, 1960) and the wall street lawyer (Smigel, 1964). Other sociologists analysed career patterns which cross occupational sectors, most of which classified occupations according to socio-economic status (Form and Miller, 1949). In contrast to these examinations of an occupation or *career line*, Spilerman (1983) notes that the focus for some sociologists has concerned the performance of critical tasks peculiar to certain work situations; he offers as examples, how policeman mediate squabbles

(Wilson, 1968), how taxi drivers 'size-up' customers (Henslin, 1968), and how failure is muted and made socially acceptable within large bureaucracies (Gouldner, 1964). Many of these sociological studies examine similar key themes – including recruitment and the socialization of new entrants, job movement or mobility, adjustment problems and retirement – and commonly review these themes from the point of view of the employing organization.

Throughout the 1970s, however, much of what was written about careers and job histories was interwoven into studies of social mobility. Mobility as a concept is of great significance for an understanding of the careers of professional footballers, for there are very few 'one club' players. A large body of literature in the sociology of occupations examines mobility. This concept is defined as the movement from one job to another at the same occupational level, and from one occupational level to another (Noscow and Form, 1962). Mobility constitutes a central concern for sociologists studying careers (Nicholson and West, 1988), although they have generally centred their attention on identifying broad *patterns* in the development of careers. Noscow and Form (1962) suggest that 'the orderly movement from one job to another may be referred to as a *career pattern*' (p. 284), and that, sociologically, a career refers to any sequence of occupational change whether *vertical* or *horizontal*. There are many sociological examinations of basic types of career patterns, though the more easily identifiable patterns tend to be connected with 'professional' occupations which display higher levels of bureaucratization (see, for example, Hall, 1948; Form and Miller, 1949; Lipset and Bendix, 1952; Wilensky, 1962). Abbott and Hrycak (1990) suggest that through the 1960s and 70s, studies of mobility within careers had merged into the broader sociological literature on mobility, resulting in two noticeable effects. Firstly, mobility within careers is usually treated in terms of individual transitions rather than an unfolding sequence of jobs. Secondly, the examination of whole career patterns (which might include movement within and across occupational sectors) created insuperable difficulties methodologically which led to such studies disappearing, more or less, from the literature. This second point requires elaboration.

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The primary reason for the lack of literature throughout this time is that sociologists found that individual job histories were not orderly movements, but involved frequent job changes, and shifts in occupation, employers and workplaces, and these movements often brought about changes in status for individuals (Wilensky, 1961). For sociologists undertaking 'objective' examinations, careers did not appear orderly, and consequently, questions were asked as to the viability of the concept 'career', and whether the general idea of an orderly career pattern was in fact a 'mirage' (Abbott and Hrycak, 1996, p.146). Furthermore, through the 1970s, questions were asked as to whether the range of work histories, and the varying degrees of 'order' and 'disorder' in work histories of any sub-group, could be accounted for within a single typology of occupations. Significantly, Wilensky (1961) argued that a majority of people in a work force could be said to have a *disorderly* career, as opposed to the commonly understood orderly career. He gave attention to the degree of orderliness of a work history (p.126), and by this he means the extent to which the career line conforms to the notion of what a career is believed to involve; that is, a sequence of related jobs in which one enters at a low level and progresses through a hierarchy to reach a higher level prior to retirement. However, confusion can arise when one considers the value-laden argument of what is, or is not, an orderly career. For example, Wilensky's (1961) study indicates importantly that what might appear somewhat random from an outsider's perspective may in fact be logically structured from the point of view of the incumbent. It is clear, then, that one cannot separate out 'objective' and 'subjective' views of careers, but that these two views must be thought of by sociologists as distinct, yet inseparable levels of occupational life.

Another limitation of the mobility or job transition literature is that the career patterns identified by sociologists have been classified exclusively according to socio-economic level (Noscow and Form, 1962). According to Brown (1982), in analyses of occupations and occupational structures, sociological connections have been made between class structure and social mobility, primarily due to the accessibility of data on people's occupations. Despite their usefulness, these data are not a comprehensive representation of adults as they neglect those without gainful employment, and other aspects of social class such as property ownership.

Few sociological studies of careers take account of the types and rate of mobility of a working life. Wilensky (1961) comments that it is commonly agreed that work history data are crucial for an understanding of occupations in modern society. Brown (1982), more recently, set out the importance of 'work histories' to studies of occupations, and examines the sociological connections between the concepts 'work history' and 'career'. For Brown (1982), work histories share common conceptual ground with the sociological notion of 'career' as proposed by Goffman – that is any social strand of any person's course through life – and he suggests that 'past and potential future work histories are likely to be important for an understanding of the meaning of an occupation to its holder and of the influence of occupational position and milieu on values and beliefs' (p. 120). Three points taken from Brown regarding the importance of work histories have relevance for this study.

The first of these points is that Brown believes an understanding of work history data is significant as one's job can say something about 'self-image'. One may have experienced considerable job or occupational mobility but still refer back to the 'skill trade' one favours, even when undertaking other types of work. The second point is that adopting a longitudinal perspective when analysing careers in order to understand mobility produces quite different data from the conventional cross-sectional view. Goldthorpe (1980) suggests that work history data,

> show that a wide diversity exists in the actual routes and sequences of worklife movement that men have followed even between similar origins and destinations. Thus, these data serve to undermine the idea of there being, as some writers have suggested, a 'normal career curve' by reference to which the interpretation of cross-sectional data might be aided (p.121).

Goldthorpe's point, which is reiterated by Brown, is that people who occupy similar jobs or who are categorised together in occupational typologies, might come from varied backgrounds and have diverse statuses, and enter similar jobs for a wide range of reasons and in incomparable circumstances. In an attempt to differentiate between the variables mentioned above and, perhaps, to distinguish

disorderly career patterns, Brown implies that one ought to integrate analyses of occupational identity and individual work histories.

Thirdly, and leading on from point two, Brown (1982) suggests that,

> work histories focus attention on one of the areas of social life where there is an interaction between individual decision and action and social structural opportunity and constraint; and where the outcome of such interaction has important consequences for both individual and society. 'Choice' and 'loss' of job, for example, can radically affect individual identity; the movement of individuals into and between occupations has important consequences for employing organisations, occupational associations, and class formation (p.123-124).

The importance of understanding the 'two-sidedness' of the concept of work history is clear from Brown's article. For him, there is a significant interplay between *career* patterns, that is, the dynamics of personal identity and the image of 'self', and job histories of individuals. In other words, any analysis of job histories would be narrow and sociologically inadequate if it did not interweave, as an aspect of the overall sociological framework, an understanding of the social biography of individuals. Analyses of this type should take into consideration the 'predispositions, preferences and expectations' (p. 124) of individuals, as well as their material resources (property etc.) and market capacities (skills, qualifications, experience, etc.). In summary, Brown (1982) suggests that one needs to take account of three interdependent factors when sociologically assessing work histories. One should consider, firstly, 'orientations to work', for example, one's expectations and preferences to the succession of employment; secondly, how orientation to work affects one's career 'strategy', that is, one's ideal typical occupational history. Neither of these factors can be understood in isolation, but must be considered in relation to the third factor, the 'structure of opportunities' available to the individual at that time. Sociologically, careers must be thought of as reflecting the ways in which self-images and orientations are obtained by individuals throughout the 'process of becoming', and are directed, in part, by available resources and opportunities. Such considerations provide a link

with other relevant concepts in the sociology of careers, in particular, *commitment* and career *contingencies* that are examined later in this chapter.

Modern careers

It was pointed out previously that questions concerning the viability of the concept 'career' were starting to be asked in the mid-nineteen seventies by sociologists examining work organisations (see, for example, Terkel, 1975). For instance, the suggestion put forward both by Brown (1892) and Goldthorpe (1982) is that much of the data generated on work histories at the time of their research militate against the notion of a 'normal career curve' (p.121). Since the 1980s, therefore, there have been fundamental changes in the way the term has been employed such that some sociologists have even questioned whether it has outgrown its usefulness. The basis for this type of argument is that 'the capability of one's career to provide continuity is being challenged' (Young and Collin, 2000, p.2). The concept of career was developed largely in traditional industrial society. As industrial capitalist societies have changed in so many fundamental ways, some sociologists have suggested that, perhaps, in its traditional form, it no longer offers a range of useful meanings with which to understand and interpret the experiences and behaviour of people at work. Gold and Fraser (2002) suggest, for example, that the forms of bureaucratic control giving rise in the past to *careers* reflected an industrial stage of economic development now on the wane in advanced countries. Concepts developed in contemporary sociological literature, like post-Fordism (Watson, 1995) and 'the information society' (Castells, 1996), reflect the view that the underlying structures of industrial societies are undergoing changes which undermine the notion of the traditional career (Collin and Young, 1992).

Hierarchical careers have traditionally been associated with strong internal labour markets and long-term employment with individual employers, yet as human resource policies have become increasingly 'flexible', the understanding of what constitutes a 'career' has shifted (Gold and Fraser, 2002). Sennett (1998) argues convincingly that the emphasis on *flexibility* is changing the very meaning of *work*, stating: 'Flexible capitalism has blocked the straight roadway of career,

diverting employees suddenly from one kind of work into another' (p.9)[1]. In this stimulating study of 'the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism', Sennett (1998) argues that in this 'new' post-industrial social world not only are the careers of employees becoming fragmented, but so too are individuals' experiences of 'the self'. With increasingly flexible work organisations, time horizons are shortening, and workers are 'always starting over' (Sennett, 1998, p.84). How, asks Sennett, can a person 'develop a narrative of identity and life history in a society composed of episodes and fragments?' (p.133). For Sennett (1998) careers in this new social order are imbued with 'aggravated vulnerability' (p.130). The result of these changing circumstances, he argues, is the development of a 'pliant' self suited to 'short-term work experience, flexible institutions, and constant risk-taking' (p.133). Sennett's work is notable among a number of other publications (see, for example, Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Jackson et al, 1996) which address the issue of the future of careers.

To summarise thus far, the demise of the traditional hierarchical career is widely acknowledged by many sociologists. It has been 'replaced', according to sociologists such as Sennett, by a proliferation of more fluid and individual career choices, encompassed by the overarching notion of *boundaryless careers*. On a policy level, academics adopting managerialist perspectives have increasingly discredited traditional careers (in relation to policy guidance), viewing them as stultifying individuals' initiative and creativity and promoting an unhealthy dependence on organisations for the conduct of one's working life (Cohen and Mallon, 1999). Since the 1980's therefore the emerging literature on occupational careers has been dominated by discussions of boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), portfolio careers (Handy, 1990), and 'new careers' (Arnold and Jackson, 1997).

In brief, the boundaryless career is the broadest term of the three mentioned and stands in opposition to the bounded organisational, bureaucratic career. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) suggest that the boundaryless career does not characterise any single career form but rather 'a range of possible career forms which defy traditional employment assumptions' (p.3). By contrast the notion of 'portfolio careers' developed by Handy (1990) focuses explicitly on the nature of

employment relationships. For Handy the idea stems from the growth of subcontracting or outsourcing of labour by organisations and constitutes a themed collection of different bits and pieces of work for different clients. He argues, furthermore, that portfolio careers enable workers to possess greater control over their time and working practices (Handy, 1990). Lastly, the 'new career' reflects the increasing fragmentation of career patterns implicit in boundaryless and portfolio careers, but focuses attention on the implications for workers of a process of fragmentation. This approach to understanding contemporary careers is concerned principally with the self-perceptions of workers under investigation (Arnold and Jackson, 1999). Despite variations in emphasis, the three concepts all mark a significant shift away from the traditional focus on organisational careers, focusing instead on the subjectivities of workers, that is, how workers think and feel about their work. However, Cohen and Mallon (1999) highlight three particular concerns about the available literature. Firstly, they suggest that the empirical basis on which assertions of new developments in careers are made is modest at best. Secondly, they argue that the debate is strewn with untenable dichotomies about the old and the new career. Thirdly, little is written about the potential downsides of more flexible careers. For example, even Sennett (1998) openly admits that he employs more 'mixed and informal sources' (p.11) in his 'essay' on the outlooks of employees. Bradley et al (2000) suggest that attention has tended to focus on the winners from more flexible work patterns rather than the losers.

Despite the apparent lack of empirical studies to date, what data are available indicate almost indisputably – a notable exception is offered by Sosteric (1996) – that the growth of flexible labour promotes an emphasis on short-termism that erodes the loyalty and commitment of workers (Sennett, 1998). Characteristics such as these that were integral to the 'old' work ethic still remain important yet, for Sennett, they do not find expression in modern flexible workplaces. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) suggest that this new economy, characterized by independent work activities, is confusing for workers (and they suggest policy-makers too) because it entails the co-existence of opportunity, insecurity, flexibility and uncertainty (p.3). The concept of career, that is, the idea that an employee can engage in 'the practice of having a career' has been absent for the

most part from contemporary literature. However, a focus of relevance for this study, and one which appears to be in the ascendancy in terms of academic interest, is worker subjectivity and, specifically, the issue of 'control' and 'power' in the workplace.

Ezzy (2001) suggests in this connection that in the second half of the twentieth century there has been a noticeable shift from authoritarian to normative forms of control. He argues that authoritarian forms of control rely on financial rewards and threats, whereas normative forms of control attempt to 'shape' work culture and workers' subjectivity in order to ensure compliance. Casey (1995) indicates also a trend in managerial practices which purposefully attempt to 'colonise' the identities of workers such that they become more the kind of person 'the company' would like them to be. Ezzy (2001) argues similarly that the manipulation of workplace culture is designed to enable management to manipulate employee selves. There is a common pattern that indicates that contemporary managerial practices focus on worker 'selves' in order to promote self-discipline among employees[2]. Ezzy (2001) states for example that: 'The new corporate culture attempts to ensure worker compliance through necessitating the Protestant bourgeois ethic that encourages employee self-discipline, devotion and service, and restrains dissent and self-indulgence' (p.633). Kunda (1992) argues in similar vein that: 'The ideal employees are those who have internalized the organization's goals and values – its culture – into their cognitive and affective make-up, and therefore no longer require strict and rigid external control' (p.10). To enable managers to 'engineer' workplace culture they have, according to Casey (1995), utilised the rhetoric of 'family' and 'team' to engender compliance on the part of employees and to reproduce asymmetrical power relationships. The trend to organise workers in teams is engineered explicitly to encourage the development of a sense of responsibility among team members (Ezzy, 2001). Ideally, co-workers experience peer pressure rather than managerial pressure that leads to the maintenance of organisational commitment among employees.

One important feature of non-traditional (post-modern) careers which is considered to some degree by many of the sociologists referred to in this section concerns the way in which employees are constrained to cultivate *social networks*

in order to enhance their career interests. The research evidence suggests that 'new' types of careers, of which three have been identified here, require employees to take responsibility for their own career futures. This is probably what Grey (1994) had in mind when he referred to a 'career as a project of the self' (p.479)[3]. With respect to getting a job therefore, people in, for instance, boundaryless careers are more frequently involved in job searches than are individuals *bound* up in traditional, organizational careers, such that they will more frequently have occasion to call upon their contacts for information regarding opportunities and potential employers. Developing such networks of social contacts is therefore a paramount concern for those who want to 'build' a career. Gaining access to other people's knowledge and resources is a fundamental career step. Social networks are 'constructed' and fostered instrumentally in order to maximize the chances of career success. The networks developed by professional footballers in relation to the process of transferring are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Two concepts that are often discussed by sociologists interested in careers are 'commitment' and 'contingency'. Understandings of the concept 'commitment' influence this study throughout. For example, all managers assume a high level of commitment on the part of their players, as an aspect of the latter's professionalism (see Chapter Three). The following section attempts briefly to examine these two concepts, highlighting their relevance to a sociological understanding of careers and, in particular, the careers of professional footballers.

Commitment

The notion of *commitment* has been employed by interactionists to illuminate the ways in which 'normal' individuals identify progressively with particular roles, or become involved in conventional institutions and behaviour (Becker, 1963)[4]. Much of the literature included in this chapter has tacitly incorporated notions of commitment to particular types of behaviour, for example, identification with roles, and loyalty to an organisation, although most of the sociologists mentioned, with the exception of Becker (1960), have not undertaken any formal analysis of this concept. It is important to gain some sociological understanding of the extent

to which people attach themselves, as it were, heart and soul, to an occupational role and self-identity over time. Ashton (1973) provides an example, arguing that the degree to which one 'commits' oneself to, and is 'involved' in, one's work (role), is structured along class lines, and affects the elaborateness of one's self-conception. Therefore, ideas of commitment are considered useful in assisting a developmental frame of reference for the purpose of studying careers.

Becker (1960) suggests that, 'sociologists typically make use of the concept of commitment when they are trying to account for the fact that people engage in *consistent lines of activity*' (p.33, emphasis in original). This concept is used in interactionist studies of occupational careers to help make sense of the *process* whereby individuals *become* committed to a particular occupation and occupational role. Becker implies that, sociologically, the act of committing oneself involves more than making a simple pledge or promise. Something must keep the individual dedicated to a particular line of action, and to continually work at presenting a distinctive occupational identity. The process of becoming committed involves the individual in making commitments *to other people* and, in part, it is the involvement of others, and sensitivity to *their* expectations and feelings, that binds the individual to the commitment. In other words, having claimed to be a certain kind of person, it is necessary (and, for Goffman, moral) to continue to act appropriately to others, and to live up to the identity originally presented. Becker argues that the process of commitment involves the formation of a network of relationships in which several types of 'interests', or as Becker labels them 'side bets' (p.35), become bound up unintentionally with the continued maintenance of this consistent behaviour. For the individual, these interests or 'side bets' may seem at first extraneous to the original course of action. So, when making a commitment, something of value to the individual is offered as a 'stake' to significant others, for example, one's self-esteem, identity, and perhaps, economic interests, which will be lost if appropriate behaviour is not maintained. The threat of loss of self-esteem, or personal identity, or financial loss, assists in constraining the individual's freedom to behave differently; that is, the individual's perception that other courses of action are inappropriate for the situation. In this connection, there are links between Becker's work on the concept of commitment, and Goffman's work on moral careers.

The process of becoming committed can be described in terms of the development of a network of interdependencies between the individual who is making the commitment and the significant others to whom 'side bets' are made. As people invest time, money and emotion in the pursuit of a specific achievement, they become more committed to pursue and stick with a course of action. Furthermore, a shift in the line of action not only involves changes for the individual but, additionally, for all those people whose interests are bound up in the original commitment. The appreciation of what is involved in the process of making a commitment to something, and the complexities of the web of relationships tied interdependently to a particular course of action, may only be revealed when one tries to break it.

There are a whole series of 'formal' and 'informal' commitments bound up in the career paths undertaken by individuals. Commitments can be made formally, for example, when one makes marriage vows or signs a job contract and informally, when one promises something to others. The sociological differences between these two types of commitment seem few. In both cases, for example, one might feel committed and yet not be committed, or one may be fully committed without being aware of that commitment. What is sociologically important is the understanding that the process of becoming committed involves a whole series of commitments to other people which influence the ways in which one acquires different frames of reference to an occupation, and gives meaning to one's work situations. Any analysis of commitment entails identifying the processes via which people become committed to different types of job through the acquisition of different identities and 'frames of reference' (Ashton, 1973; p.101).

Ashton's (1973) study, which focuses on the development of different frames of reference, refers to factors that influence the *process* of occupational choice, and which are linked to the self-conceptions of people in different social classes. There exists, for Ashton, a patterning to the occupational experiences of people and how they view the world, and these experiences can be located within the overall class structure. In his study, Ashton examines unskilled, lower working class occupations, and semi-skilled, working class occupations, suggesting that in

the course of their early socialization, young people acquire particular frames of reference which commit them to certain types of occupation. For example, Ashton proposes that working class children develop a particular self-image and orientation such that they should aim for specific 'skilled' work, such as a 'trade', and that unskilled work is beneath them. In most cases examined by Ashton, the occupational experiences of the individuals reinforced the frame of reference and self-image originally acquired by them as children, and enabled them to adjust and commit to their positions at work. Interestingly, Ashton (1973) suggests that whilst the acquisition of a skilled trade 'fits' working class self-images and frames of reference, the mastering of these particular work skills progressively 'unfits' them for other types of occupation and alternative self-conceptions. In this regard, Ashton is considering the enabling and constraining features of the 'structure of opportunity' available to working class children. Via processes of socialization, frames of reference which have built in orientations to particular types of work are acquired. While the frames of reference acquired function to open opportunities in particular situations, they function simultaneously as *blindnesses* in others.

This notion has been referred to as 'trained incapacity' (Veblen, 1914). Both Burke (1965) and Merton (1957) employ this concept to illustrate how one's orientation to one's occupation and, in the case of Burke, day-to-day life, is concurrently a way of seeing and also a way of not seeing. Merton (1957) incorporated this concept in his elaboration on the dysfunctions of bureaucracy. He suggests that actions based upon one's orientation, training and experiences, which have been successfully applied in the past, may lead, under conditions that are not recognised as significantly different, to inappropriate responses. In other words, under changed conditions, one's 'training may become an incapacity' (p.197). Through the process of becoming committed to an occupational role, with all that is bound up in that process, serious possibilities available in other occupations and career lines may be neglected.

Contingencies

The concept of *contingency*, like the notion of commitment, has been tacitly incorporated into much of the sociological work on careers. In short, this term

refers to the way in which careers are beset by particular turning points, junctures and episodes that mark the decisive passage in the life history of an individual. The episodes in one's life may seem like 'chance' happenings, but many of the early sociologists who focus on occupational careers and life histories, for example, Becker (1953), Goffman (1961) and Lemert (1967), have drawn attention to the structured nature of contingencies. Abrams (1982) suggests that career contingencies are 'contingent not in the sense of being merely adventitious random occurrences but in the sense of being incident upon distinctive patterns of interaction. They are significant conjunctures of uncertain outcome, decisive moments at which the career is framed and structured one way or another' (p.272). Abrams (1982) points out that certain contingencies are specific to particular careers.

For Becker (1953) and Goffman (1968), contingencies are significant in the study of *deviant* careers, for example, because they mark events specifically for becoming, or not becoming, a marijuana user, or a mental patient, and both argue that within the process of becoming, structure and contingency 'lock together' (Abrams, 1982, p.273). It is suggested by Abrams, in similar vein, that the importance of the concept of a deviant career lies in the understanding of the process of becoming deviant as being a matter of the 'social organisation of contingencies' (p.273). Not all people who embark knowingly on a particular course of deviant action meet with similar outcomes, or are certain to react to the actions of other people in similar ways, and there is not a formally ordered sequence of prescribed stages as one might expect in a professional bureaucratic career. It can be argued, however, that the life histories of mental patients are structured as one can identify the sorts of things that are systematically likely to happen, whether earlier or later. For Goffman (1968), the contingencies at issue in the process of becoming a mental patient may be related to socio-economic status, visibility of the offence, proximity to a mental hospital, amount of treatment facilities available, community regard for the type of treatment given in available hospitals, and so forth, and despite occurring independently of each individual, are basic and common to all members of the social category.

Furthermore, what sociologists might understand as a structured characteristic of social relationships may be understood in quite different terms by those involved in those relationships. Gowling (1973) provides an interesting example in his consideration of the place of 'luck' in a professional footballer's life. He suggests that if one listens to conversations between footballers off the field, a surprising amount of emphasis is placed on luck to assist explanations for those things that happen in games for which no explanation can be found in terms of players' movements, skill, or fitness. He quotes the following as typical of regular comments made by players, 'we didn't get the breaks', 'we didn't get the run of the ball', 'you have to earn your luck'. Gowling suggests that players often explain their careers in similar terms, and that it is widely believed that 'getting to the top' necessitates a considerable degree of good fortune. The following example illustrates this point:

> To a certain degree, to be 'spotted' by a scout requires a train of events the causal explanation of which would be put down to luck by the footballer. For example, not only does one have to play reasonably well, showing skill and application, but the scout has to be there to see it, and usually more than once!
>
> Similarly, to keep free of serious injury would require luck in the terminology of the pro. In reverse, they say that to receive a serious injury is 'just bad luck' (Gowling, 1973; p.140).

Gowling's references to 'luck' in the life history of a professional footballer would, in sociological realms, be understood in relation to the social organisation of contingencies. In this connection it might be suggested that (employing a phrase from Goffman's (1968) work on mental patients) if those who desire to become professional footballers numerically surpass those who actually make it, as might be expected, one could say that aspiring footballers distinctively suffer, not from a lack of skill or endeavour, but from *contingencies*.

Sociologically it would be inappropriate to suggest that, over the life history of an individual, one 'suffers' from contingencies. A more adequate explanation is one that understands the enabling and constraining features of the network of

relationships in which one is embedded over time. So, one becomes a professional footballer on the basis of contingently, but not at all randomly, ordered sequences of interaction with other people. From the perspective of the players, their route to professional football may seem as though they were on many occasions in the right place at the right time, a series of chance happenings. For the sociologist, it is possible to identify connections between all players who become professionals, for example, in relation to the types of people with whom they mix, the formation of their self-identities, the ways in which they learn to become committed to the role of footballer, and so on. The individual biography of every footballer can be read and examined separately, but can only be understood sociologically in accordance with the changing configuration of relationships formed by footballers and other people.

The careers of professional footballers

Against this background understanding of the sociology of careers, the object of this next section is to provide an initial examination of the careers of professional footballers in England. There is a great deal written about footballers, the football industry in general and the careers of professional players, most of which focuses overwhelmingly on the 'heroes' of the game and often exhibits a nostalgic and sentimental attachment to past eras. Before examining the careers of players in relation to the explanatory models discussed in this chapter, it is perhaps worth detailing initially a number of salient properties of the *work* of professional footballers.

The first characteristic to note is that professional footballers engage in highly skilled manual labour, although as a form of employment it can be said to differ from industrial working class occupations in a number of important respects. For example, unlike the workers in industrial jobs – about whom a great deal has been written in the sociology of work (see, for example, Braverman, 1974; Goldthorpe et al, 1968: Gouldner, 1964) – the devotion exhibited by professional footballers to their careers is performed willingly, at least initially, because self-fulfillment is anticipated and sometimes found in this career. In short, the idea that a player can 'build' a career as a professional becomes integral to his sense of 'self'. It is

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perhaps more accurate therefore to call professional football, in Max Weber's sense, a 'calling' rather than an occupation. A calling is a systematic pattern of discipline and behaviour that is designed to produce a distinctive 'personality' or self (Weber, 1965, p.182). Professional football is a vocation or 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1997, p.238) that requires kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1993) and has much in common therefore with occupations such as ballet dancing. For example, the career of a professional footballer is a comparatively short-term affair. Gearing (1997) suggests that the average playing career lasts no longer than eight and a half years. During this time, players are exposed to relatively high levels of risk that for some may result in career termination. Although the figure may vary, there are approximately 50 players each season whose careers as professional players are terminated because of injury (see Drawer (2000) for a fuller discussion of the risks of injury in professional football).

The work organisations in the football industry are characterised by highly skilled, highly mobile workers who can move from one employer to the next – perhaps several times in the course of a career history – while accumulating experience and developing their professional reputation. Since the abolition of the maximum wage in 1960 and the landmark Eastham Case in 1963 – a ruling which stipulated that the ability of a player to earn a living was being hindered and, as such, the transfer system could be considered an unreasonable 'restraint of trade' – the majority of players have been signed on relatively short fixed-term contracts (mostly lasting from one to five years)[5] with enormous rewards concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of employees; the majority of entrants into the game fair comparatively poorly in economic terms. The professional player spends much of his youth preparing for his football career, and injury spells disaster with the prospect of early retirement. Professional footballers begin their 'careers' from an early age (some promising young players can be linked to football academies from as young as eight years old), but very few players continue beyond thirty-five years of age, the point at which players can draw on their pension funds. Their training involves intense and prolonged periods of physical exercise both with and without a football. Many of the players

interviewed for this study commented on the dedication and discipline that is required to *make it*.

Prior to the 1960s, the footballer was traditionally a kind of working-class folk hero (Critcher, 1979) who came from the same socio-economic background as the spectators who paid to watch. Following the changes to labour relations in the early 1960's there were dramatic changes to the economic situation for certain players. Daily life altered in significant ways and impacted heavily on their cultural identities. The footballer as local hero is, for Critcher (1979), culturally defined by his ability on the field and his role as public figure off it, and he argues convincingly that the new deals in labour relations 'fractured' (p.163) the social and cultural relations by which the identities of players had previously been structured. Thus, Critcher identifies a sequence of four typologies or styles of player identity in the post-1963 era; the traditional/located player, the transitional/mobile player, the incorporated/embourgeoised player and, finally, the superstars/dislocated player. The changing styles of cultural identity of players were reflected, for Critcher (1979), firstly on the football pitch, especially in an apparent increase in gamesmanship and petulance and secondly, off the pitch, in relation to the influential bearing players possessed. Critcher's work is useful as it represents the first attempt to examine the economic emancipation of players and understand the subsequent widening gap between the celebrity elite and the 'journeymen'.

Professional footballers rely on their playing skills and athleticism as well as on opportunities (what they may call 'lucky breaks') to achieve positions in clubs with whom they hope to attain rewards and grow in terms of experience. It is a very short career and, therefore, issues of retirement and ageing present important and persistent questions for players about their identities and reputations. Because a footballer's sense of self is deeply invested in their 'physical' body, a 'bad' injury is a disruption of the self that is the equivalent to the trauma of a chronic illness. Since players have a *calling* to play football, bad injuries that may potentially end a football career and *the wear and tear* that accrues from season upon season of physical hardship are accepted as inevitable features of football life. There are few vocations where professional status is so inextricably

dependent on the athleticism of the body; in the world of professional football, injury and the threat of injury are routine. Thus, uncertainty is a built-in characteristic of a player's career; career advancement is never secure[6].

One of the most striking features of careers in professional football is their temporal dimension. Footballer careers offer up for scrutiny many examples of what Spilerman (1983) calls, a 'career-line vulnerability to ageing' (p.559), for there are a number of prominent features of this form of physical work that inevitably vary with age. As they get older, players also appear to become increasingly sensitive to job insecurity, to the strain of searching for their next contract or club, and to the continual manoeuvring to remain visible in a highly competitive labour market. Contemporary footballers are likely to experience well-patterned sequences of employer changes over the course of their work histories, in ways similar to employees in certain other highly skilled occupations (see, for example, the orchestral musicians examined by Faulkner (1973) and the ballet dancers scrutinised by Wulff (1998)). The chances of upward mobility for players decrease sharply after about the age of thirty, which unavoidably prompts them, earlier or later, to adjust their occupational outlooks and commitments and plan their 'second' careers. Football, therefore, is a good example of a form of contingent employment. In interview, few players spoke of having second jobs or of methods of income risk diversification.

Players possess an external market 'value' based on reputation. Their playing reputations may be thought of as 'capital' which is converted into economic rent[7]. However, the reputations of players are characterized by their high volatility. Sky-rocketing success or acclaim over the course of a season are likely to lead to sudden shifts in demand towards previously little-known players. In terms of understanding their 'value' to significant others, it is possible to distinguish between their 'physical' and 'symbolic' capital. For instance, Giulianotti (1999) suggests that the physical capital of players is central to their *productive* relationships with the club. Certain players have been regarded as exceptionally gifted in terms of their elevated levels of skill and athleticism, and thus they enjoy considerable physical capital, that is, prestige flowing from bodily 'investments' (Wacquant, 1995). Ageing inevitably reduces physical capital, and so this source

of prestige is not renewable and is characterised by its social scarcity. By contrast, ageing can be associated with increases in wisdom, respect and influence, and the power that comes with ageing in certain social contexts is associated with symbolic capital, that is, honour and social status. The physical and symbolic capital of the body stand in a contradictory relationship. Sporting careers, including professional football careers, can be understood in terms of these contradictory pressures, where retired professional players can retain their symbolic capital by becoming celebrities in related or adjacent fields, for example, television punditry and coaching[8].

Professional football is a labour intensive industry in which employment is offered by immobile forms of capital to increasingly mobile forms of labour (McGovern, 2002). That is, employers are fixed to specific geographical locations while the employees – the players – can move between cities and countries. There is a significant potential for global trade in professional football, which has been the subject of much scrutiny (see for example, Boon, 2000; Jones and Chappell, 1997; Maguire and Stead, 1998; McGovern, 2002; Stead and Maguire, 2000). Such high levels of mobility indicate that there is a great deal of information available about players. McGovern (2002) suggests that professional football 'is unique' as an industry because the playing contribution of employees 'is unusually transparent' (p.25). Potential employers can observe the performances of players and therefore assess first hand a player's relative strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, employers might seek information about a player's professional reputation informally through personal contacts. The movement of players is enabled *and* constrained by the *social* capital acquired by managers and players alike through their social ties and contact networks, a point that is discussed in Chapter Seven. The central problem facing potential employers is obtaining reliable information on players, for the quality of any future performances cannot be predicted with certainty. McGovern (2002) argues that given this distinctive information problem, managers tend to hire the services of players who most resemble themselves in the belief that they are better able to predict how they will perform in situations of uncertainty (p.26). In this connection, McGovern utilizes what Kanter (1977) terms *homosocial reproduction*.

Football clubs may recruit players by either transferring them 'in', by employing the services of 'free agents' – that is, players who are 'on a Bosman'[9] as is common parlance among contemporary players – or by developing the talents of gifted young players via the employee-led apprenticeship system. Professional players may move between clubs when their registration is transferred from one club to another, usually subject to the payment of a fee to the club that holds the player's registration. By contrast the primary purpose of the apprenticeship scheme within the football industry is to recruit and develop young players. This hierarchy-based method of recruiting has some similarities, according to McGovern (2002), to a firm's *internal labour market*, in that it consists of a job ladder with entry at the bottom, and upward movement which is associated with the progressive development of skills and knowledge. However, in contrast to the classical definition of internal labour markets, neither entry at the bottom nor the retention at the top are defining features of the job ladder within the football industry (McGovern, 2002). Employers view apprenticeship schemes in most cases as a way of 'retaining' trained staff, although this is not necessarily true in professional football where promising young professionals may be sold to finance the recruitment of others. Within each football club there exists a vertical hierarchy of playing levels (career stages) that represent for each player the possibility for promotion from within. In short, the job ladder in professional football represents the development of teenagers from youth level, through the reserve team and into first team football. A job ladder of the type referred to by McGovern (2002) however is not similar *in kind* to the idea of 'career progression' as discussed earlier in relation to the notion of traditional careers. There is in professional football no formal understanding of career progression, or in more specific terms, what such *progress* may constitute for individual players: unlike, for instance, workers employed long-term in bureaucratic organisations. This point requires further clarification.

In his unpublished Masters thesis, former professional player, Alan Gowling, identifies similar *career stages* to those of McGovern: that is, stages which lead from entry level as an apprentice to 'first team regular'. Gowling (1974) uses a traditional career model, similar in kind to those developed by Oswald Hall and Howard Becker referred to earlier, to examine the process of becoming a

professional footballer. As a starting point such a traditional model can be potentially enlightening. However, having reached the position of first team player, Gowling then struggles to conceptualise the manner in which the *career trajectories* of players may alter in unplanned ways as they experience promotion, demotion, long-term injury, managerial change, ageing and other career contingencies. Furthermore, he omits to examine the development of relatively stable patterns of social relations bound up in professional football that enable the establishment, and maybe institutionalization, of particular informal social positions in terms of their authority and prestige; positions of status such as *senior professional* (Gowling, 1974). In other words, the careers of professional footballers are not similar to careers in traditional bureaucratic organisations as very few players experience a unilinear sequence of movements in an upward direction, and even fewer encounter, when compared to industrial working class employees, long-term attachment to individual employers. The career trajectories of players interviewed for this study are best described as unplanned and undirected. The turning points that lead to promotion or demotion are, for the most part, unforeseeable. Thus few players can aim and work instrumentally for promotion in a manner similar to the young accountants analysed by Grey (1994). With the exception of the very elite, most footballers focus their energy on securing their next contract at the same or a future club. Whilst his work on this matter remains speculative and unsubstantiated, the point by Giulianotti (1999) that 'players experience common career patterns' (p.114) does not seem to fit the picture in the light of the evidence obtained for this study.

Thus, the career patterns of players may be described from an 'objective' viewpoint as 'disorderly' (Wilensky, 1961). The career routes of players involve sequences of vertical and horizontal movements within the four football leagues that are difficult to predict. Some players may drop out of the Football League altogether and join 'non-league' clubs in the Conference leagues or below[10]. Yet, if traditional career models which focus on orderly progressive stages lack analytical adequacy in terms of understanding the career trajectories of footballers, are the *post-modern* notions of career any more insightful? Is it possible to understand the work histories or careers of professional footballers in relation to 'boundaryless', 'portfolio' or 'new' careers?

In order to understand the development of the three models of career identified, it is necessary to comprehend the onset of 'new' flexible employment arrangements in post-Fordist workplaces. For Sennett (1998), flexibility marks a return to an 'arcane sense of the job' (p.9), in which people undertake fragments of work over the course of a lifetime. Flexible workplaces are contexts in which workers develop short-term work perspectives, which are said to undermine employee trust. With these points in mind it is pertinent to note that professional footballers, as will be demonstrated over the course of this study, have always concerned themselves – almost exclusively – with securing their next playing contract. As novice professionals, few are in a position to formulate *realistic* career goals. Thus, the working conditions experienced by employees in 'new' flexible workplaces are similar in kind to the conditions of work under which the bulk of football players have *always* laboured. That is, historically, all but the most elite of players come in time to be preoccupied with the insecurities and precariousness of their present state of employment. Transformations at work over the past fifteen years have led Doogan (2001) to the conclusion that 'lifetime employment is for most workers a thing of the past' (p.420). According to Elliot and Atkinson (1998) we now live in an 'age of uncertainty'. Yet, professional footballers have neither experienced working life which is secure in the sense alluded to by Elliot and Atkinson, nor can they ever consider the prospect of 'life-time' employment in a manner similar to Doogan. While some players may however consider life-time employment within the 'football industry', one might argue that their careers are in-built with a risk of failure.

Perhaps, then, the focus of attention by managerialist academics on boundaryless careers offers more purchase in relation to examining the career of the professional footballer. Whilst it is highly competitive, the labour market in professional football has always been relatively flexible, and some sociologists have commented on its increasing internationalisation, marked by a regional orientation (McGovern, 2002). Players have always been aware of the uncertainty of the marketplace, the limited duration of average contracts, the excessive supply of potential quality labour, and their own vulnerability to ageing. However, questions remain about the degree to which players can be said to be able to

control, or self-manage, their careers. If among the central features of 'new' and 'portfolio' careers is increased 'power' for employees that enables them more and more to determine and take control of their work destinies, is it possible that footballers too enjoy greater measures of control over the organisation of their work?

In business worlds it is advisable, according to career guidance counsellors (Richardson, 2000), for employees to 'move on' in order to show ambition. Remaining in the same job for too long is perceived negatively. Having the flexibility to accumulate varieties of work experience is one method of 'building' or self-managing one's career in a 'positive' fashion. Whilst such career advice is practical and meaningful for employees in flexible enterprises such as, for example, the film and computer industries (Littleton et al, 2000), the merit of such advice for the majority of aspiring footballers is debatable. In order to 'move on', some players may let their contracts expire. At face value this strategy involves a high level of risk for it relies on the positive and accurate self-perception of a player – or perhaps their agent – about their reputation. One might assume that a player who is willing to risk the prospect of unemployment in order to further their career chances is confident of attracting the attention of other employers. By contrast, other more vulnerable – usually older – players accept willing most reasonable offers in order to secure future employment, if only in the short term. The strategy adopted by a player will depend on the circumstances experienced by them at the time, although age is an important social factor in this connection. In short, therefore, some players might feel self-confident of their ability to control the direction of their careers whereas others may not think they have any alternative choices other than to accept what is on offer. Although a much fuller understanding of control is undertaken in Chapter Eight, it is perhaps sufficient at this point to suggest that adopting a 'flexible' approach to managing one's career is a high risk undertaking in an occupation in which it is commonly understood that *'you are only as good as your last game'*.

There is a more general perspective in which players are portrayed as commodities that can be traded between employers in the same way as machinery or land (McGovern, 2002). Unlike employees in other industries, footballers do not have

the right to resign from their existing contracts in order to take up employment with a different employer within the football industry. However, the highly commodified status of players is unlike other commodities that are manufactured, since what is exchanged is *labour power*. Thus, footballers differ from conventional commodities because of their marked variability and plasticity and because the individual 'abilities' that are being purchased – the playing talent, the athleticism, the *desire* to play well, and so on – cannot be separated from their owners (McGovern, 2002). Employers must rely on the active participation of the player, since they cannot exclusively control the purchased commodity. Professional footballers are, therefore, examples of 'fictive' commodities (Offe, 1985).

The early studies examining labour relations in professional football drew heavily on Marxian perspectives (Giulianotti, 1999). From such 'objective' (Blyton, and Noon, 1997) viewpoints, professional football is likened to a capitalist enterprise in which the player becomes a worker alienated from his productive labour, despite the satisfaction he may accrue from his work. Both Rigauer (1981) and Vinnai (1973) examine the strict controls applied to the daily training endured by players such that they come to be programmed to perform patterns of behaviour and movements which have been predetermined. Cashmore and Parker (2003), who focus specifically on England international, David Beckham, argue similarly that 'a relentless pursuit of one's dream comes only via a series of predictable, mundane and heavily prescribed workplace behaviours' (p.13). Giulianotti (1999) suggests in this vein that the 'corporeal control' (p.109) established by disciplinarian managers over the football institutions mirrors, for example, that of the sergeant within the barracks. For Giulianotti (1999), managers continue to favour 'good professionals' who exhibit concern for their diet and levels of fitness and who can, in short, 'look after themselves'. Such 'pliant' selves, he argues, can be refined more easily from a plastic commodity into *footballing* capital.

It would be a mistake however to characterise the work of professional football, like work undertaken in industrial settings, as 'routine'. It is clear that the (opportunities for a) variety of work which may be undertaken is limited, globally. One may change geographical setting but not the character of work. Yet the

proliferation of industrial and mechanical metaphors employed in, for example, the review of literature undertaken by Giulianotti (1999) perhaps undermines the levels of personal autonomy granted players in terms of using their own initiative 'once they have crossed the white line'. There is no denying the fact that training on a daily basis and preparing for matches may involve a relatively high level of routine in terms of mastering a fairly limited range of observable abilities. Weekly training may appear, and be experienced subjectively as, predictable and mundane, yet the range of less tangible skills developed by competent players – one may think in this connection of a player's ability to 'read' the game, to be able to create 'space' for oneself and others, and to make appropriate decisions when in possession of the ball, and so forth – are not mental abilities that may be comprehended within the Taylorist approach to workplace organisation and job design referred to by Rigauer (1981) and Brohm (1978). So, whilst the work of professional footballers entails often 'heavily prescribed' routines, an analysis of the character of their work should neither be blind to the opportunities for creativity and unpredictability in terms of playing styles, nor the unpredictable course and outcome of matches.

A career as a professional footballer could be considered a good example of a labour of love, for many young players 'labour' quite literally for the *love* they have for playing the game. Usually, 'labour of love' arguments (Freidson, 1990) relate to activities to which people are irresistibly committed. A labour of love therefore is an undertaking in which one would participate voluntarily; it is a form of behaviour that people, such as artists for example, would practise for leisure purposes, and from which they may obtain 'self-actualisation' and, perhaps, a 'psychic income' (Menger, 1999). For Freidson (1990) the only viable criterion for distinguishing leisure from work and various types of work from each other becomes the social meaning of activities, their value and the context in which they are undertaken. Freidson (1999) argues that the same activity can be leisure or non-work in one context and work in another. Some occupations may be considered labours of love, as motivations for undertaking such work are not in the immediate and obvious Marxian sense, self-interested. In other words, as a labour of love, professional football is an activity in which 'income' of an economic variety is not the sole determinant of labour market behaviour. Young

apprentices are often told that they should consider themselves to be lucky and not to throw away the opportunity they have been granted. What could be better than to be paid (sometimes a great deal of money) to do something that you love? The bulk of the literature on occupations has been concerned with the fact that when people do have work, it is characteristically unsatisfying. Professional football in an ideal sense is a form of work which should be the opposite of alienated labour, yet the data obtained for this study, as well as a small number of autobiographies by 'journeyman' players, attest to the financial, physical and emotional insecurities they continue to experience. These points feature centrally in this study.

In order to conclude these opening notes on players' careers, one final comment will be made. In short, the point is that a player's career should not be considered independently of the career of his manager, which develops, so to speak, in parallel. Thus, it is important to bear in mind the interdependent power relationship between players and managers. It is a manager's task to select his starting eleven players and substitutes from his playing squad based, by-and-large, on his confidence in and knowledge of their ability and, importantly, current form. Managers too attempt to 'build' and self-manage their careers, although like a supervisor in a factory they are not 'active' participants at the point of production, unlike their players[11]. The manager must rely on the team he selects and prepares for matches, for their reputations rest almost exclusively on the results achieved by their players. This is in contrast to players whose reputations can remain intact even though they may be among the members of a losing team. In other words, even though players work as members of a team their performances are often considered in terms of their individual contributions by managers and 'lay' observers. Relations between managers and players therefore are strained by the constant demands of managers for performance returns on investments in him. The player as worker is put under pressure to 'produce the goods' or else face rejection of some nature. These points also appear in many of the later chapters.

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[1] The English origins of the term career meant *a road for carriages*.
[2] See also the research undertaken by Kunda (1992) and du Gay (1996).

3 Grey (1994) examines 'career' as a 'project of the self'. Drawing on a Foucauldian theme of self-discipline, Grey establishes an understanding of the way young accountants are 'encouraged' to self-manage their careers as 'projects'. That is, Grey suggests that aspiring accountants are constrained to adopt (for they have few alternative choices) a self-disciplined instrumental orientation to their careers that becomes the guiding criteria for choices made even in non-work spheres.

4 One speaks of 'normal' individuals as there is a considerable amount of work on deviant careers.

5 Players may also be signed on a week-by-week non-contract basis. Accurate figures for players who are attached to clubs on this basis are not known.

6 More detailed examinations of the manner in which players manage their injuries are dealt with in Chapters Four and Five.

7 Economic rent is an important concept in economics. A short definition of this concept is as follows: any excess that a factor earns over the minimum amount needed to keep it at its present use. The term is often applied to 'superstars' who earn controversially large salaries in highly specialized types of labour. In short, many high profile football players have a style or a talent that cannot be duplicated, whatever the training. The earnings they receive are mostly economic rent from the viewpoint of the occupation. For example, Manchester United star Ryan Giggs would choose football over other alternatives even at a much lower salary than he was earning even as far back as 1994. However, because of Giggs's skill as a football player, most teams would pay handsomely to have him, and he is able to command a high salary from the team he does play for. From the perspective of the firm, Manchester United, most of Giggs's salary is required to keep him from switching to another team and, hence, is not economic rent. From the viewpoint of the 'football industry', however, much of his salary is economic rent.

8 In this respect one can think of Gary Linaker (footballer) and Andrew Castle (Tennis player) who have developed second careers as television presenters and footballers such as Alan Hansen and Ally McCoist who are football commentators and pundits.

9 In December 1995, Jean-Marc Bosman, a Belgian player who wished to transfer from RC Liege in Belgium to US Dunkerque in France, brought a case before the European court. Liege were allowed to fix a fee for the player without negotiation and, as a result, the transfer had fallen through because Dunkerque could not afford the fee. The decision of the European Court found in favour of Bosman, deciding that the transfer system restricted the freedom of movement of employees (footballers) in the European Union in contravention of Article 48 of the Treaty of Rome. Thus, the court ruled that a club could not demand a transfer fee for a player who had completed his contract. The Bosman ruling referred to players moving between member states of the European Union, but the implication of the judgement is that transfer fees for any player out of contract could not be legally enforceable. This ruling affected English clubs since they could demand a transfer fee for any player out of contract.

10 Below the four professional leagues in England there is, what is known as, the non-League pyramid, involving semi-professional, 'non-League' football clubs. The league at the top of this pyramid is called the Conference League and feeds directly into Division Three. So, the club that wins the Conference League is promoted to the Football League and will, therefore, be counted among the ninety-two professional football clubs. Whilst clubs in the Conference League are labeled semi-professional, players may be both professional and amateur. That is, some players who play for clubs in this league may be paid as full-time professional players while other may play for no or little monetary reward.

11 Some players are also the club managers. They are known as 'player managers'.

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Chapter Two

Theory and methods

Professional football is among the most popular and widely recognised sports worldwide. A great deal has been written about professional footballers by biographers, journalists and the players themselves. A small number of the elite players, for instance, Pele, Maradona, Ronaldo and David Beckham, can rightfully claim to be among the most well known sports stars on earth. Yet, it is hard to think of a professional sporting practice that has been so mythologised and so little researched by social scientists. While descriptions of matches are endless and player (auto)biographies could be stacked high, sociological studies of professional footballers and their careers are thin on the ground. With precious few exceptions, existing serious studies of the professional game are dominated by 'quasi-insiders' (Wacquant, 1992, p.222) such as journalists who tend to concentrate on the *public* (and commercial) side of the sport at the top echelons. Therefore, in a manner similar in kind to the study of boxers undertaken by Wacquant (1992), I try to 'break with the spectators point of view' (p.223) and instead attempt to approach the occupation of professional football through its least known and least spectacular sides.

In Chapter One I examine the concept of career and sociological studies of occupational careers including professional football. The focus of this chapter is on the sociological theories *and* the research methods employed in this study. Throughout the research, theory and method are not treated as distinct aspects of this process; there is an important two-way interplay between theoretical framework and methods. In short, one informs the other throughout each stage of the research process. In addition to the literature on footballers, particularly their coverage by journalists, I use interviewing as the primary research method. In this chapter I address the question of what constitutes a theoretically-oriented approach to the process of interviewing in a sociological study. Thus, the objects of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, to set out and justify the theoretical framework that

was employed to inform the research process and, secondly, to describe and explain how this study was undertaken, step-by-step.

<div align="center">I</div>

Assumptions of symbolic interactionism

Interviewing could be characterised in part as interactionist insofar as it is like a conversation that involves give-and-take between two people (Denzin, 1989). The interview is primarily a gift of time and information that is given by the respondent, not the interviewer. One of the central problems that besets interviewing as a methodological tool concerns the fact that the 'encounter' is itself a specified, albeit short-term, period of ongoing *interaction*. It is a focused, usually face-to-face encounter in which both interviewer and interviewee are constrained by rules of etiquette and 'moral' conduct (Goffman, 1959) while at the same time eliciting intimate and private thoughts and outlooks. The notion of 'the presentation of self' is central in such encounters for the interviewer and respondent, as each interview can be characterised as a dynamic process in which both participants are defining and interpreting each others' behaviour. Of importance for symbolic interactionists is the fact that the interviewer cannot neglect the *voluntary* nature of the interview as a meeting which is freely and willingly entered into by the interviewee. This point is important as the interviewer is attempting in part to reflect and encourage the expression of attitudes on emotional issues, some of which at the time may have generated heightened levels of depression or embarrassment for the interviewees. Before I undertake an analysis of the way in which interactionists employ focused interviewing as a 'digging-tool' (Denzin, 1989) to generate knowledge, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the underlying assumptions of symbolic interactionism.

Three basic assumptions underpin symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). First, people, individually or collectively, act on the basis of the meanings that things have for them. That is, people do not respond instinctively or directly to things but attach meaning to them and act on the basis of the meaning. Blumer (1969)

suggests that such things (or 'objects') may be classified into physical, social and abstract objects. Objects constitute anything that can be indicated or referred to. Underlying this assumption is the presupposition that the social world is interpreted through the use of symbols (language and gestures, for example) in the process of interaction. People then act on the basis of the meaning that is derived from symbolic interaction.

Second, meaning arises in the process of interaction among individuals (Blumer, 1969). Meaning for an individual emerges out of the ways in which other individuals act to define things or objects: objects must be seen as *social* creations. Symbolic interactionists assume that individuals act in particular ways because they have agreed on the meanings attached to things in their environment. However, the social (and *moral*) 'order' achieved among people must be understood as an on-going process. A major focus in interactionist studies is on the *negotiation of social reality*, usually at the level of group or face-to-face dealings. People, they argue, are led through a sequence in which they initiate action, come together and monitor the responses of others against a background of meanings and expectations called the 'definition of the situation' (Blumer, 1969).

Third, meanings are assigned and modified through a process of interpretation that is ever changing, subject to redefinition, relocations and realignments (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionists take a non-deterministic view of people and assume that there is a degree of freedom of choice in human behaviour. This approach, however, tends to downplay the constraints on action, emphasizing instead the capacity of people for abstract and reflective thinking that enables the development of symbolic use of language and gestures for the creation and communication of meanings that produces a common response in interaction among others. Thus, a person indicates to him or herself the things towards which they are acting; they have to point out to themselves the things that have meaning. The making of such indications to one's 'self' is an 'internalised social process' (Blumer, 1969), otherwise referred to as the conversational dialectic of the 'self'. However, this third point highlights a central weakness in interactionist thinking, for although people may believe their behaviour is self-directed, they certainly

cannot control the outcomes of their behaviour and decision-making. A point demonstrated aptly in the introduction to this thesis.

Arguably among the most important tenets of symbolic interactionism is the idea that individuals and the circumstances in which they exist are inseparable. The focus of research for symbolic interactionists is on the character of individual and collective interaction. The process of *coming to know* – that is, the generation of knowledge – involves seeking out ways to explain the way people define the situations in which they are enmeshed. The aim of symbolic interactionism is to explain how people so often come to see phenomena from their perspective (even when the perspective is morally questionable). Awareness of 'self' is acquired through 'taking the role of the other'. As such, social life exists as a creation of human interactions. So, symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical perspective for studying *how* individuals interpret objects and other people in their lives and how this process of interpretation leads to behaviour in specific situations. To test the validity of these premises, according to Blumer (1969), one must engage in a direct examination of actual human group life.

To orient their way through life, people look to a variety of what are termed reference groups (Shibutani, 1962), and as they move through a range of situations which bestow identity on them they are said to follow a career. Employing career as a sensitizing concept, interactionists have made a key contribution to the sociology of work. Some interactionists, like Hughes (1958), tend to take the study of occupations as a way into learning about society (Watson, 1995). Atkinson and Housley (2003) suggest that interactionists such as Becker and Goffman developed the concept of career and applied it to an understanding of occupational lives and processes. Examining 'work' in (moral) career terms, Atkinson and Housley (2003) argue, enables an analysis of the opportunities, dangers, sanctions and rewards that characterise the living world of the work setting. Interactionists focus on the social drama of work – the interaction and 'focused encounters' (Goffman, 1961) that take place at work – noting the problems and tensions that are socially constructed in this context. Sociological concern, therefore, turns to how individuals cope with and adapt to these problems, and relates them to the problem of maintaining their identity.

Interactionists focus on how workers in different occupations cope with the particular problems of their work. It is perhaps in the later work of Erving Goffman that the concept of an 'interactionist' approach to work and careers finds a momentum that was to have a profound effect across the social sciences (Atkinson and Housley, 2003). In the light of the assumptions of symbolic interactionism as set out briefly here, what can be said of the way in which these central tenets influence research and, in particular, the process of interviewing?

Interviewing from an interactionist perspective

Bearing in mind the previous discussion, from an interactionist perspective one can argue that it is imperative to understand what individuals know about their world, how they come to know it, and what they believe to be important. Research questions in the context of a semi-structured interview should focus on how individuals – in this instance, professional footballers – interpret meanings and come to act in particular circumstances, for social situations constrain the way people think and act. Thus, gathering data in a variety of social contexts in which football players are bound up may provide a broader understanding of their behaviour and work perspectives.

Interactionism highlights a very important aspect of interviewing as a method of generating research data: namely, the interplay between the meanings imparted orally to questions by the respondent and the interpretations of those meanings received by the interviewer. Important, in this connection, is the developing sociological imagination of the interviewer that enables information to be elicited in more skilful ways. However the question of tacit understanding raises the spectre of interviewees responding in a manner in which they present their 'self' in more credible ways. In other words, in what sense can one be sure that interviewees are not selectively distorting, masking or lying about their thoughts and feelings on any given question? A number of sociologists have noted the problems of the question of the way respondents may selectively (or conveniently) distort information (Finch, 1993; Lee 1992; Parker, 2002; Ramsey, 1996). Finch (1993) argues, for example, that *trust* is an issue of paramount importance in an interview context in which respondents may feel exploitable. Finch (1993)

suggests, *pace* Oakley (1981), that in her experience trust is fostered in research contexts in which the creation of a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee is avoided. Similarly, Ramsey (1996) states that people are more likely to reveal more of themselves when they are allowed to identify issues that are relevant to them. Ramsey (1996) notes, in a manner comparable to that of Finch, that interviewees will be more open when talking to interviewees who seem to share some of their beliefs and assumptions. Collinson (1992) argues also that a focus on, and sensitivity towards, the issue of trust is a means to reduce or minimize 'distance' (Goffman, 1959) between researcher and respondent. I do not want to dwell on this important point at this juncture. For the time being it must be sufficient to suggest that for the most part, interviewers must have faith that the respondents, who *volunteer* to participate, are telling the truth and that their responses are sincere.

Interaction is the critical link between 'individual' and 'society' (Fine, 1993) and becomes a focus of concern in relation to research on the careers of professional footballers. Research questions ask how players come to assign meanings to objects. Examining the points of view of individual footballers necessitates a consideration of both *micro* and *macro* social contexts in which they, as players, reflect on their experiences and consider appropriate future action. Therefore, researchers must also attend to the past occurrences of players and the history of their occupational groups, as both locate the individual player and the situation within which he is embedded within time and past events. In the context of understanding the careers of professional footballers, for example, managerial change or changes to the personal life of the player such as the birth of a child or the death of a parent may precipitate changes in their long-term behaviour and outlook. Data collected for this study include information about the changes in the social context of the football club and changes in the behaviour of players over time.

Following Blumer's (1969) lead, methodologically the task of interactionists is to examine the behaviour of respondents on two levels: that is, they attempt on one level to connect the 'symbolic' conversations people have with themselves – and how they come to assign meaning to objects – with their observable behaviour in

the context of face-to-face interaction on another. Interactionists regard human *interactions* as their basic source of data and they focus on the occasions of interaction. Goffman (1961) examined *social interaction* through what he termed 'focused encounters'. Interactionists attempt to view the behaviour described from the point-of-view of respondents such that they may begin to capture and comprehend the reflective character of the human mind. The interviewer must seek to explain how the dynamic definitions of 'self' are reflected in ongoing patterns of behaviour. 'Social selves', for interactionists, are situated 'objects', which have meaning only in the context of human relationships. Interactionists must explore the conceptions of 'self' and the relationships that reproduce and 'furnish' (Denzin, 1989) those conceptions. In other words, the interviewer must strive to elicit information that enhances an understanding of on-going patterns of interaction and developing definitions of 'self'. Thus, interactionists such as Erving Goffman and Howard Becker view human behaviour as a dynamic social process in which individuals are continuously defining and interpreting each other's behaviour. They are concerned in their research not only with knowing an individual's point of view, but also with understanding the processes by which points of view develop (see, for example, Becker, 1963). Symbolic interactionism assists the researcher to focus on how, for example, players ascribe meaning to the behaviour of others, such as club physiotherapists or managers, when attempting to make a decision about, for instance, whether or not to have a pain-killing injection.

To repeat then, the focus of symbolic interactionism is mainly on small group situations and face-to-face encounters: this perspective represents the dominant 'micro' version of sociology (Fine, 1993). Thus, interactionism constitutes an appealing approach in relation to a study of people whose daily work is situated among a relatively small, tight-knit group that is all but 'closed' to non-group members[1]. This approach is useful also in the context of undertaking sociological interviews insofar as it draws attention towards the central 'sensitising' concept (Blumer, 1969) of 'self' and the way in which, for example, one's *self*-identity (or self-concept) and *status* may change over the course of, in this instance, an occupational career. However, while on one level this notion is undoubtedly significant in terms of sociological understanding, by definition it also, on another

level, draws attention to the following two limitations. Firstly, since the aim of interactionists is merely to understand the process of interpretation being used in a given context, to see things from the actor's point of view, they tend to avoid discussions of non-personal, larger-scale global networks of relationships which have major constraints on behaviour. The framework interactionists bring to bear on their data rules out an examination of blind social processes. Secondly, by focusing on face-to-face encounters, interactionists may examine shifting conceptions of 'self' and individual processes of *self*-reflection, yet they do so in the context of people who construct and define meanings for themselves as an outcome of the contexts in which they are bound up, as though their actual 'selves', their conceptions of 'self', somehow exist 'inside' them solely. People act towards other people – and 'objects', to employ interactionist language – on the basis of the meanings that they have for them. Thus, their focus tends to be directed inward, as it were, to the social self, rather than outward to social structure, in order to explain how relative social stability is arrived at. For Elias (1978), this form of viewing oneself represents *Homo clausus* or 'closed person' ways of thinking. So, using Elias's idea as a point of departure, the following section will outline and examine the contribution of figurational sociology as it relates to this study.

Assumptions of figurational sociology

While a number of sociological concepts have been employed in this study from a range of theoretical approaches, in addition to symbolic interactionism the other principal perspective from which a large number of sociological ideas have been drawn derives from the writings of Norbert Elias. Among his many contributions to sociology, but one that is particularly pertinent at this juncture, is his rejection of false dichotomies between, for example, 'individual and society', or what others term the 'agency and structure' dilemma. Put more clearly, Elias argues that it is senseless to generate conceptual distinctions, like 'individual and society', as though they were separate things, like bat and ball. He attempts to resist the ever-present philosophical pressure to split and polarise conceptions of humankind. Elias (1978) argues that such conceptual polarisations are reflected in, for instance, adherents to a belief system who ascribe the highest value to 'the

individual' (p.129). The heavy emphasis in symbolic interactionism on individualism and on one's 'inner self' that stands apart from other people and is cut-off from 'external things', meaning society and 'objects' (Blumer, 1969), is indicative of an approach to understanding social life which lays stress on a first-person perspective, an 'I'-perspective and a 'we'-perspective (Goudsblom, 1977). Such theories typically attempt to build upwards and outwards from the notion of two isolated adult individuals, acting and reacting to each other's actions. For Elias, this type of approach is typical of *Homo clausus* thinking and has the tendency to restrict the scope of sociology.

Elias proposes that sociologists should move away from the dominant (Western) view of humans. Instead, he argues, sociologists should aim to view people as *Homines aperti* (open, bonded pluralities of interdependent human beings) as this, in part, will assist their move away from the stale debates which undermine more adequate levels of understanding (Hughes, 1998). Elias argues that talking of, for instance, 'individual and society' can lead sociologists to marginalise the notion that people always come in groups and that 'society' is nothing more than a structured set of individuals. Interactionist, Erving Goffman, in his first book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), employed what he called a dramaturgical perspective, looking at 'interaction' as if it consisted of theatrical performances (Goudsblom, 1977). His attention is devoted entirely to the occurrences within a given social setting. Despite the strengths of Goffman's study, the limitations of his work become more clearly visible when one contrasts it to the figurational approach. In short, these limitations may be highlighted if one considers that Goffman never inquires how the social settings upon which he focuses have developed within wider networks of interdependencies. For Elias, two key sociological concepts are *interdependence* and *process*.

Interdependence and Process

Elias argues that people need other people for every aspect of their lives. No-one lives completely separately from other human beings. They are conceived through other people and they are dependent on others for survival. Everything that people need but cannot make themselves must come from others. What they need to

know and do not yet know must be learnt from others. No one is independent, as all people are *dependent* on others. These mutual dependencies mean that people are linked to one another. Social arrangements, therefore, consist of people who are (inter)connected by mutual dependencies. In other words, social arrangements or networks of ties consist of *interdependent* people[2]. Elias always insists on making the crucial distinction between 'interdependence' and 'interaction' (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998).

The networks to which people belong change as the years go by; they must be understood as *in process*. For example, when young people start work they make new relationships, with colleagues and management. Many others now depend on them; customers and colleagues, for instance, rely on their achievements and capabilities. Those who rise to senior positions or even management occupy a more central place within the network, and others are particularly dependent on them. People marry and children are born, who are in turn dependent on the young parents. Thus, one can say that the balance of dependence shifts in the course of a lifetime. As adults, a great deal of time is spent not only with our families but also at work among people we have met and with whom we will eventually lose contact. This type of development is characteristic of modern social life. Ties with colleagues, subordinates and superiors at work, are often fairly formal, focusing on the work to be done in the shared surroundings. This is why people spend a lot of time learning to cope with their work, with (and sometimes in spite of) others around them. Within the network of work, 'informal' relations also develop that may be quite emotional – workers make friends and enemies in their workplaces. Over time a person will join new networks and leave others. Such changes of network – and in someone's position within a network – go together with changes of attitude and conduct.

In modern social life people develop among a variety of kinship, work and friendship networks, and so on. Some people may develop friendship ties that remain for life, and may extend well outside immediate networks, and may prove useful, for example, in a quest for employment. However, people may be connected in direct *and* indirect ways. Thus, people do not have to be aware of the existence of others for them all to be members of the same relational network. In

modern social life, people all over the world are engaged in activities which affect the lives of other people of whose existence they are often unaware. While the people with whom we have direct contact undoubtedly have a significant impact upon our lives, it is also the case that the actions of other people at considerable physical distance from us and, indeed, often beyond our consciousness, can also have a profound effect upon our lives.

To repeat, people make up networks of interdependencies that change over the course of time. Throughout life, we depend on others for things we need. Hence, one might say that someone who is able, or in a position, to help fulfill needs or desires has a degree of *power*. Thus if A (person or group) is dependent on B (person or group) to achieve something, this creates a relationship of dependence between them. B has the power over A – the power to help fulfill A's need or not. As people are generally not equally dependent on each other, the balance of power between them is usually unequal. For Elias (1978), the concept of *power*, conceptualised not as a property which one person or group has and another person or group does not have, is a structural characteristic of all social relationships. Power is very rarely, if ever, simply a case of the one-way dependence of one party on another; it almost always refers to people's interdependence. Elias makes these points clearer in his 'games model' analogy. These are greatly simplified analogies but, Elias argues, because the games, like chess and football are themselves social processes, the models demonstrate the relational character of power.

At the simplest level, Elias provides the model of a game involving two people; one of whom is a much stronger (more *power*ful) player than the other. The stronger player can, to a very considerable degree, constrain the actions and limit the options of the weaker player to make certain moves, whereas the weaker player is much less able to constrain the actions of the stronger player. However, the weaker player does have some degree of control over the stronger for, in planning his or her moves, the stronger player has at least to take the weaker player's moves into account. Thus, Elias concludes, in any game the players always have a degree of control over each other. They are, that is to say, always interdependent. However, if the strengths of the two players involved in the game

are roughly equal, the course of the game increasingly passes beyond the control of either (Dopson and Waddington, 1996). Predicting the game even a few moves in advance becomes difficult. Elias (1978) writes, 'to the extent that the inequality in the strengths of the two players diminishes, there will result from the interweaving of moves of the two individual people a game process *which neither of them has planned*' (p.82). Thus, the 'interwoven web' of moves of each game follows a largely 'blind' course (Elias, 1978). As the number of players grows, the complexity of each game becomes a great deal more unpredictable.

In the second model proposed by Elias, the strong player plays a number of weaker players simultaneously. While the weaker players do not communicate with one another, the stronger player's capacity to control each game may be undermined by the fact that he or she is having to conduct so many games at once. Clearly there is a limit to the number of games in which one player can effectively participate simultaneously. So, as the number of interdependent players grows, it also becomes clear how little the game can be controlled and guided from any single player's or group's position; indeed, the opposite is the case, for it becomes clear how much the course of the game – which is actually the product of the interweaving moves of large numbers of players – increasingly constrains the moves of every single player (Dopson and Waddington, 1996). Thus, one may conclude that whatever we set out to achieve, we are dependent on others at every turn and in every possible way: we are part of social formations of interdependent people. Elias refers to dynamic formations of interdependent people as *figurations*.

So, our actions have consequences for others, just as we are affected by what others do. It is not always possible to take in the whole picture, to see beforehand how the chains of interdependence work. For this reason, the consequences of our actions are often quite different from what was intended. Such unintentional consequences are a result of the interplay between the actions of people who, while dependent on one another, are unable to grasp all the patterns of interdependence involved; the end result, therefore, is the outcome of a blind social process. From the point of view of the individual player, an interweaving network of more and more players functions increasingly as though it had a life of

its own. Elias (1994) argues that: 'From this interdependence of people arises an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will of the individual people composing it' (p.444). According to Mennell and Goudsblom (1998), concepts such as 'interdependence', 'power' and 'figuration' appear to refer to separate, motionless objects, but on closer examination they actually refer to people in the plural, who are now or were in the past constantly in movement and constantly relating to other people. The ideas developed by Elias that are relevant for this study may be summarized briefly as follows:

1. Sociology is about people in the plural – human beings who are interdependent with each other in a variety of ways, and whose lives evolve in and are significantly shaped by the social figurations they form together.

2. These figurations are constantly in flux, undergoing changes of many kinds – some rapid and ephemeral, other slow but perhaps more lasting.

3. The long-term developments taking place in human figurations have been and continue to be largely unplanned and unforeseen.

4. The development of human knowledge takes place within human figurations, and is one important aspect of their overall development (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p.39).

Figurational sociology and interviewing: some initial thoughts

The four principles outlined above, while simple and for most sociologists self-evident, are more difficult to practise consistently in sociological research and writing. In terms of interviewing as a research tool, Green (2000a) argues that semi-structured interviews provide a particularly suitable means of eliciting data on the figurations in which people are involved. He suggests that the networks of interdependence enable and constrain what people 'think' and what they 'do'. People's thoughts and action can only be understood if the shifting networks in which they are enmeshed are examined. Semi-structured interviews therefore are a useful tool for getting beyond the superficial aspects of people's consciousness, enabling a researcher to exploit opportunities for probing respondent's perceptions of their own 'figuration'. Networks of interdependence may be considered spatially and temporally. For example, Green (2000a) suggests that researchers may probe the personal and local, and the past and present dimensions of the lives of their respondents.

These arguments concerning the effectiveness of semi-structured interviews outlined by Green (2000a) are, in their own right, useful and enlightening. Expressed alone, however, they do not highlight the distinctiveness of Elias's approach to the generation of social funds of knowledge. In the course of undertaking the interviews, an interviewer is able to ask respondents about their personal interests, their views about the personal interests of other people and their thoughts about the collective interests of groups to which they belong, and so on. What the interviewer is doing, in effect, is identifying the 'I'- and 'we'-perspectives of their respondents. Semi-structured interviews enable an interviewer to become familiar with others' *ways of life*. The 'we'- perspectives of various people and groups in a figuration should be examined, not because any of them may reveal the 'truth', but because they are all constituent parts of the figuration (Goudsblom, 1977). However, identifying with the 'we'- perspectives of different people may enable the interviewer to understand something of the sense in which certain actions and objects are meaningful, yet taken on their own these interpretations may be misleading. Goudsblom (1977) argues that a comparison of different 'we'- perspectives will usually give rise to contradictory

interpretations. In short, Goudsblom (1977) states that, 'while 'we'- perspectives are indispensable in sociological analysis, so are 'they'- perspectives which show the figuration from a greater distance, and may thereby offer a fuller view of how the intentions and actions of the various groups are interlocked' (p.181). Effective research therefore requires a certain *detachment* from the routines of everyday occurrences in order for the interviewer to acquire an awareness of long-term developments affecting these daily occurrences. Thus, it is important sociologically to recognise that the data collected for this study – the subjective interpretations or 'I'- and 'we'- perspectives of players – reflect a particular stage in the development of professional football.

Elias suggests that a certain measure of 'involvement' (or identification) is an essential ingredient of the work of sociologists. Elias (1956) outlines his thoughts concerning the relationship between sociologists and their *involvement* in their research as follows:

> [sociologists] cannot cease to take part in, and to be affected by, the social and political affairs of their groups and their time. Their own participation and involvement, moreover, is itself one of the conditions for comprehending the problems they try to solve as scientists. For while one need not know, in order to understand the structure of molecules, what it feels like to be one of its atoms, in order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without active participation and involvement (p.237).

Elias argued that all sociological analysis requires both *involvement* and *detachment*. The challenge for sociologists, therefore, lies in combining and maintaining an effective balance between, involvement (or identification) and detachment. Elias's ideas concerning the way sociologists tackle the problem of *involvement* and *detachment* are examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

II

In the introduction it is stated that one of the objects of this chapter is to describe and explain how this study was tackled. In short, this section describes each stage of the research process from the initial ideas through to the way in which the research data were analysed. In this respect, this section will resemble in kind a number of first-person analytic accounts and autobiographical writings that have been produced by sociologists who have undertaken fieldwork, and who set-out to describe the personal contingencies of research in relatively 'closed' social contexts (see accounts included in collections edited by, for example, Burgess, 1992; Hammersley 1993; Lyon and Busfield, 1996; Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991). These accounts by sociologists themselves focus on how they managed the various phases of the qualitative research process. In this light, therefore, I do not want to present my own research experiences as though they were carried out by 'non-people' in 'non-places' (Bell and Newby, 1977, p.10) In the course of this section, the problems encountered will be set out alongside a more subjective account of what it was like to embark on research about people many of whom are well-known locally and nationally and even, in their own right, could be labelled celebrities. In its entirety the research process spanned six years. This section details the decisions that were made – for better or worse – and how the study progressed in relation to the research process, the generation of knowledge and as a process of learning.

A working hypothesis

In 1997 I presented a paper at the University of Leicester that reviewed the literature on retirement from elite level sport. It was suggested in this paper that recent research in this field indicates that retirement from sport may not be a traumatic experience as *was* commonly assumed to be the case. Many contemporary sociologists and psychologists agree in principle that in most cases, athletes may not suffer from long-term adjustment problems to the extent that had been reported and that, in fact, some athletes experience a sense of rebirth[3]. Derek Swain (1991), for example, argues that athletes reach a stage in their careers when

they become increasingly *self-reflexive*. The data collected by Swain (1991) on the issue of retirement of elite and professional athletes indicate that in the 'middle' sections of their careers, athletes begin scrutinising themselves and their profession more carefully; in other words, they begin to take stock of their personal circumstances. As athletes become *more* self-reflexive about their profession and their own 'self' in relation to their profession, they gain, he suggests, a greater awareness of the behaviour and attitudes of those people with whom they are involved, for example, managers, coaches, physiotherapists and player-agents. Swain (1991) argues that the 'demands' of a sports lifestyle begin to be understood in a more objective fashion, and that 'catalytic' (p154) situations – such as rejection, a team transfer, a serious injury, changing personal circumstances such as newly born children, and so on – become watershed periods, which remind professional athletes that a sporting career is generally short-lived or that the decision for them to retire may be involuntary. Swain (1991) concludes by asserting that an accumulation point arises, as athletes experience a process of professional maturation whilst participating, beyond which they begin to focus on a decision to withdraw from active participation. Athletes grow weary of their careers, he suggests, thereby providing a stimulus for life changes. Withdrawal from sport, he concludes, was not simply a fateful moment but must be conceptualised as a process over time, which often begins soon after athletes become engaged in their careers.

In the light of these arguments I was keen to examine the developing careers of players from their viewpoints but with a particular focus on the 'catalytic' situations which may, in part, lead them to adjust their sights with regard to career 'goals', their career outlooks and their view of the inevitability of retirement. The catalytic events referred to by Swain emphasise the contingent character of the careers of professional athletes. This research therefore required a consideration of the processual nature of the careers of professional footballers. To this end the first task was to review the sociological literature of the concept 'career', which came to be among the most significant *sensitising* or orienting concepts (Becker, 1998) employed to organise and interpret the data generated during the research process.

A study on the management of injuries in professional football

As the literature review was underway, I was involved concurrently with a research proposal, the object of which was to investigate the role of football club medical staff and the way in which injuries are managed in the professional game. The original intention of this proposal was to interview past and present club doctors, physiotherapists and players about the social constraints surrounding the management of injuries, the pressure to play while injured, the ways in which issues of confidentiality are handled and the way in which the interests of the club and the player are balanced. My task in the division of labour was to interview the football players[4]. It was agreed with the research leader, who was also the supervisor for this thesis, that the interview data generated could also be used for the purposes of this PhD thesis. The study involved tape-recorded interviews of between 30 minutes and 90 minutes, and this model of interview became standard for all the interviews conducted for this doctoral thesis. Twelve club doctors and ten club physiotherapists were interviewed. Nineteen current and eight former players were also interviewed about their experiences of injury and rehabilitation. The ages of the nineteen current players ranged from twenty-one to thirty five years. All eight former players were over thirty-five years. Two players of the total number interviewed were of black Afro-Caribbean descent, though I was unable to explore social class, or minority group effects adequately. The interviews were carried out in the second half of the 1997-98 season and the first half of the 1998-99 season. All interviewees were given an assurance of confidentiality and were told that neither they nor the clubs for which they played would be identified.

In addition to the interviews, a postal questionnaire was sent to ninety club doctors who were not interviewed; fifty-eight questionnaires were returned. Doctors in the Premier League were more amenable to being interviewed, a fact which probably reflected their generally greater involvement in their clubs. However, this did mean that the sample of doctors who were interviewed was biased towards club doctors in the Premiership. Of the twelve interviews, seven were with doctors at clubs in the Premier League (one of these had recently left the club to return full-time to general practice), two were with doctors at clubs in the First Division of the Nationwide League, two with doctors at Second Division clubs whilst one

interview was with a doctor in a Third Division club; one of the Premier club doctors had also previously worked in a Second Division club. However the bias towards doctors in Premier League clubs was offset by the data obtained in the postal questionnaire. Replies were received from thirteen doctors at Premier League clubs, thirteen doctors at First Division clubs, fifteen doctors at Second Division clubs and sixteen doctors at Third Division clubs; one doctor did not indicate the division in which his club played. Of the club physiotherapists, three worked in Premier League clubs, two in First Division clubs, two in Second Division clubs and two in Third Division clubs; in addition, one physiotherapist had formerly worked in two football clubs (one Third Division club, one Premier League club) but now worked as a club physiotherapist in another sport.

The interviews I conducted focused on the players' experiences of injury. A semi-structured interview schedule was employed enabling the players to talk about their experiences in their own terms, thereby providing a greater understanding of their points of view. Having said that, the flexibility offered by this form of interview consequently gave players an opportunity to discuss their injuries, not solely in relation to treatment and rehabilitation, but also in terms of, for instance, time benchmarks, their age and stage of experience, future contract negotiations and transferring to other teams. Thus, the data generated during the first injury-related interviews lent themselves perfectly to an understanding of a range of fateful moments experienced by players. Having completed the research for the study on the management of injuries, the subsequent interviews examined other career contingencies such as transferring, drawing in part on ideas raised by players themselves.

Interviewing as a research tool

Qualitative research methods, of which the sociological interview is one, are well suited to seeking an understanding of an individual's subjective experiences and to gaining richer data more generally (Burgess, 1984). For this study, the form of interview best suited to obtaining an intimate knowledge of the 'perspectives' or 'outlooks' of players was the semi-structured or focused interview. This form of interview, unlike tightly structured or totally unstructured interviews, enables

researchers to address a range of issues in conjunction with a desirable degree of flexibility (Burgess, 1984). In other words, semi-structured interviews enable an interviewer to look at the complexities of people's thoughts and experiences precisely because of their flexibility. In the course of the encounter, interviewers may adapt questions around a basic structure in order to meet the personal circumstances of the respondents, re-order questions to coincide with the data revealed, or they may insert additional questions to probe revelations or issues as they arise. Denscombe (1998) summarises this approach in the following manner: 'The interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest' (p.113). So, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to tease out complex views and explore with the respondent the wider networks of relationships in which they are embedded. In the course of interviewing, observing the interviewee face-to-face, and reflecting upon their responses, sociological themes and patterns of behaviour were identified in the data and then subsequently 'checked out' during later interviews. Enduring patterns, themes, and what Green (2000a) terms 'categories of meaning' (p.186) emerged – see also Layder (1998) who examines 'core' and 'satellite' codes.

For the purposes of this specific study, undertaking focused sociological interviews was, arguably, the only viable option. The opportunity to undertake fieldwork – a method that might have been an alternative source of rich and abundant data – was all but nonexistent. In short, I was unable to undertake fieldwork for the following three reasons. Firstly, this study was undertaken on a part-time basis. Work commitments constrained available 'spare' time to spend within a football club. Secondly, a central barrier to participating in fieldwork in this specific occupational world concerns the issue of access. Football clubs are 'closed' to people who are perceived as 'outsiders' with very few exceptions (see, for example, Parker (1996a) and the classic study undertaken by Hunter Davies (1972)), and it would have proved very difficult, if not impossible, to gain access. Thirdly, 'covert' fieldwork was not a viable option because to have joined in seamlessly as a player – even as a trialist – among a squad would have been

physically impossible, in terms of fitness, age and skill levels. As an 'overt' fieldworker it would be difficult, although not impossible, to have gained the trust of players. The process of developing trust, such that I was not identified as the manager's spy, would have taken time that was not available.

Constructing the questionnaire

The members of the research team involved in the management of injuries study devised the initial schedule of questions used to interview the footballers about their experiences of injury – see Appendix 1. This initial list of questions was put to the first players who were interviewed. Subsequently, questions were added, omitted, or re-formulated by the interviewer conducting the interview as 'new' ideas and patterns arose. Similar interview processes have been described by Finch (1993) and Green (2000a), both of whom considered a flexible, unstructured approach to be one that facilitated greater potential for de-emphasising power differentials between interviewer and interviewee. Players responded to questions in a variety of manners that were impossible to predict. Thus, one interview could be markedly different from the next in terms of the order of questions and the types of follow-up cross-examinations that were used, in order for players' meanings and interpretations of events to be understood with a higher degree of clarity. Problems of access to players militated against re-interviewing at a later date if information had been missed first time round.

Prior to constructing a questionnaire schedule, a number of ideas or hypotheses were suggested concerning the way in which players coped with, for example, injury, ageing, managerial succession and transferring. Thus, a number of working hypotheses were already unavoidably in mind. In light of the ideas put forward by Swain (1991), however, the focus in the first instance was to encourage players to talk about turning-points and momentous occasions in their careers, including an understanding of the wider networks of people who may also have been inescapably involved at such times. The questions attempted to lead the players through an account of such *fateful* periods in time, and their experiences of them. Whilst a schedule of questions had been constructed, many follow-up prompts were improvised such that the stories presented by the players could be developed;

in short I desired their versions of events. On a number of occasions players were asked to illustrate their points with examples if possible, as at times they would make a point – for example, 'some footballers will conceal certain injuries from their manager' – without clarifying the circumstances in which such behaviour would arise. Thus, the questions were as open-ended as I could make them in the context of the interview situation. I wanted players to present their points of views and thoughts candidly and to 'tell it like it is' (Collinson, 1992a, p.92).

Finally, while the bulk of questions focused on turning points in their careers, the players did not compartmentalise their responses into neat and, for the purposes of analysis, convenient patterns or 'categories of meaning' (Green, 2000a). Many of the players discussed the way their 'outlooks' changed towards certain contingencies and their careers in general as they became more experienced or in the light of developing personal circumstances, and all talked of a number of contingencies concurrently when recounting the details of certain periods in their careers. Thus, it was not unusual for a player to mention his age and the prospect of a future contract or transfer as a consequence of a disabling injury. In short, any circumstances that led the player to be 'inactive' generated a number of uncertainties all of which were relevant to his experiences at any one particular period in time. For this reason it was important that the style of interviewing remained as flexible as possible.

Who was interviewed and how were they selected?

This doctoral study involved interviews with forty-seven male professional footballers[5]. Of these players, thirty-seven were, at the time of interview, contracted to clubs in one of the four professional football leagues in England. Ten retired professional footballers were also interviewed. The ages of the thirty-seven current players ranged from eighteen to thirty-five years. All ten former players were over thirty-five years. All the players interviewed played for English professional football clubs after 1963 and all had careers in English professional football: that is, after the abolition of the maximum wage and the changes to the 'retain and transfer' system. Two of the players interviewed were of black Afro-

Caribbean descent, although, as with the football injuries study, social class and minority group effects were not explored with the interviewees. Certain demographic information was offered by the players during the course of their interview, in particular their ages. The players included this information unprompted for, one must conclude, it was meaningful for them in terms of understanding the circumstances in which they were bound up. In other words, it was not the intention of the interviewer to 'force' the players to discuss issues of ethnicity, gender, social class and so forth, but to let them raise such matters in the course of retelling their stories. Finally, two player-agents were interviewed, one of whom worked for the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), and one who was FIFA accredited and owned an agency which looked after the interests of, at the time of interview, twenty-one players.

The players who comprised the sample were not selected in accordance with a carefully considered research design. The players interviewed were or had been professional footballers and, as such, all their career experiences were valid for the purposes of analysis. Contact with some of the players had been made using information obtained from the former deputy chief executive of the Professional Footballers Association who acted as gatekeeper. His involvement was very important in a small number of cases as without his reassurance it is unlikely that the players would have given up their time. A number of players were sent letters speculatively; in many of these cases, as was anticipated, the players did not reply. However, a very small number of players did respond. The majority of interviewees came via personal contacts (a point which is discussed later). All players who were sent letters were asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed on a range of issues related to their careers. The players were told minimally about the likely areas of discussion. At the outset of the data collection period it was considered that had players known in detail of the likely questions to be posed they may have attempted mentally to construct 'appropriate' answers, or they may have discussed them with other players. This may have presented a risk of contamination. However, one consequence of this style of interview is that a number of players from time to time had difficulty when probed recalling specific details of their experiences.

The sample therefore was constructed on a 'snowball' basis. The players who were interviewed first were asked to recommend others who they thought may be prepared also to discuss their playing and career experiences. *All* the players who responded positively to the request were interviewed as there are problems attempting to attain 'access' to professional footballers in order to organise a face-to-face encounter. Footballers, on a local or national level, are public figures who acquire varying degrees of celebrity. They do not willingly or easily grant permission for 'unknowns', as-it-were, to interview them for extended periods. Football clubs are considered 'closed shops' as few 'outsiders' are 'let in'[6]. Attempting to be selective with a group who do not give extended interviews readily would have been a mistake. At the outset of each interview the players were given an assurance of confidentiality. Part of the 'access' problem involves a residual fear for players that they may be viewed either as openly criticising their teammates or team management or more simply as complainers. The players were asked questions to which their replies would almost certainly involve former and present playing colleagues. It was important to reassure them that their comments, whether positive or negative, would not be traceable to them. If they had not received this type of assurance they may not have responded to questions openly or freely.

Arguably the only self-imposed criterion was to attempt to interview players who represented a range of playing experiences. A great deal of information is available about professional footballers, including information relating to playing statistics and career histories. Also, there are many biographies and autobiographies of footballers in which the thoughts and feelings of players are expressed openly. However, between the extremes of outstanding success and miserable failure lie many middle courses. The majority of players who write up their memoirs, with two notable exceptions[7], tend to be those who, on balance, would be positioned closer to the 'outstanding success' extreme. It was considered important to interview players who experienced a variety of career trajectories. Thus, in the course of gathering research data, a number of different 'types' of players were interviewed. For example, some of the players were well-known international players; others had played for one club solely and had never experienced the process of transferring, although all had experienced managerial

succession; the bulk of players however could be best described as 'journeymen'. A number of these players had played their careers to date in Divisions Two and Three, some had played for only Premiership and Division One clubs, while others had experienced first-team football in all four professional football leagues. The interviews generated a large amount of data that could be sociologically analysed. The sample of players interviewed was not randomly selected, and this cannot be considered, in the positivist sense of the word, to constitute a group that is statistically representative of a broader population of footballers. While this sample may, therefore, fall foul of specific methodological standards, it is important to note that, while footballers are often interviewed by journalists about their views on team performances and so on, it is rare for players, like famous actors and other people who achieve celebrity, to grant interviews in which they respond to questions so frankly and for such an extended period.

How were the data analysed?

A central principle advocated by Elias concerns the development of a two-way interplay between what we currently label 'theory' and 'research'. In other words, he suggests that the 'empirical' and 'rational' dimensions of sociology should be constantly and consciously interwoven (Hughes, 1998). Figurational sociologist, Dunning (1992), argues similarly that sociologists should always relate their observations to a body of theory and their theory to a body of observations. This *two-way traffic* (Elias, 1956, p.20) between general ideas, theories and models, and observations and perceptions of specific events is an attempt to move away from abstract discussions of theory *per se* towards always talking about theory *in relation to* research. During the process of research for this study this idea was at the forefront of my thinking. Thus, from one interview to the next I attempted to reflect upon what had been said to me, and whether I needed to change, or develop additional questions. As I transcribed and then read through the interview transcripts, over and over, I considered the questions and responses in relation to orienting concepts (Becker, 1998) including 'career', 'self-image', 'networks of interdependency', 'power' and 'control'. I asked myself whether the turning-points discussed had similar meanings for players, and if they interpreted fateful moments in similar terms. During the interviews and then as I read the transcripts

throughout the course of the research process, I constantly attempted to identify emerging patterns of behaviour among players within playing squads and across football leagues. I considered carefully whether it was possible to identify also 'categories of meaning' (Green, 2000a) based on a number of core interview themes, principally injury and transferring. Certain themes emerged, were then cross-examined thoroughly, and reached what might be termed a saturation point. In other words, insofar as I was able to judge, I identified enduring patterns of behaviour. At this point, new ideas and questions were incorporated, or new themes were probed to an extent not previously undertaken. Underpinning the totality of this research process, however, was the constant and conscious thought I gave to the changing balance between levels of *involvement* and *detachment*. The problem I encountered, then, concerns how or whether it was possible for me to maintain an effective balance between *involvement* and *detachment* such that I attained an understanding of the careers of professional footballers with a relatively high degree of reality-congruence. The following discussion will attempt, as it were, to 'self-assess' my experiences of the research process in order to address this problem.

The circumstances in which the interviews were undertaken changed from one meeting to the next. To a large degree the players dictated the location for each interview, and I had to accept their offers willingly and at their convenience in *all* cases. I attempted where possible to identify a venue within the confines of the location in order to reduce potential distractions. I was happier if I could persuade the interviewees to meet somewhere other than the football club or training ground. The more isolated the context – particularly from the surroundings of the football club – the greater the opportunity for me to gain the interviewee's full attention. I wanted to reduce the possibility that he or I would be disturbed by the presence of others, particularly colleagues or team management. Many other researchers who have written up autobiographical accounts of their research experiences have described similar concerns about engaging with respondents for the first time (Finch, 1993; Lee, 1992). Meeting up with the players was not problematic, in the sense that in all cases I knew who they were and what they looked like; in part this is because footballers are well-known people on whom information can be generated. Perhaps the only concerns I brought with me to the

encounter related to my doubts and worries about 'doing a good job', since this was my first experience of interviewing. Was I going to 'cut it' as a sociological interviewer? Could my observations of the players and my reflections on their responses enable me to identify patterns of behaviour and to comprehend a 'fuller picture', what Elias (1956) would term reality-congruent knowledge?

To repeat, then, I already knew something of the players prior to our sociological encounter. For instance, some of them were currently in, or had been involved with, international football squads, or had experienced football at the highest club levels. Aspects of their career trajectories were known. Some appeared regularly on television programmes or had official and unofficial websites dedicated to them. Judgements could be formed about whether they had been 'successful' thus far. Moreover, television presenters and newspaper journalists had interviewed a number of the players. It was possible to listen to or read about their views concerning (mostly) football matches in which they had been involved. Some players had even spoken about career contingencies such as injury and ageing. Thus, certain preconceived ideas about particular players had inevitably been formed or at least considered prior to our meeting; for the players, however, I was a new face. The most noteworthy factor influencing the research process overall and my experiences of it relates to the fact that I have formerly been employed as a *player* by a football club, firstly as an apprentice-player and secondly as a 'young' professional. I had played at a professional level, albeit for only a short period (four years), yet during this time I was, in Merton's (1972) terms, an 'insider'. This point is particularly important to stress, for there are innumerable ways in which my former position of 'insider' and my perceptions and 'knowledge' of the culture of the professional game could affect the research process. (When describing her subjective experiences of illness, Renee Fox (1959) draws attention to the advantages and disadvantages of personal 'involvement' in medical research). For example, such 'insider knowledge' would inevitably influence the questions formulated for the interview schedule prior to the interviews; the patterns of behaviour that I expected to identify; the 'meanings' players attributed to occurrences in their daily working lives; the manner in which players interpret fateful moments and turning-points in their careers. This list is not exhaustive, however it is important sociologically for me to acknowledge

insofar as I am able the frames of reference that I brought to bear upon the research process.

The last point concerning my former 'insider' status was important in terms of initially attempting to build a rapport with the players. While admitting that I had been a professional footballer clearly did not make me 'one of them' (Finch, 1984, p.79), it did, perhaps, make me feel and though they would be less likely to see me as someone who knew nothing about their lives. I thought also, like Cannon (1992) in her study of cancer patients, it might lend greater legitimacy to my line of questioning. I thought this status could be used to my advantage, so when introducing myself to them and during the course of my preamble, in which I assured them of confidentiality, I explained that I had formerly been a young professional with a Division Two club. I presented this information in order that they did not consider me to be a complete 'outsider'. It is impossible to say with any certainty whether or not developing this initial 'rapport' – if, indeed, this was what I achieved – was helpful, as I presented myself in this fashion to all of them. In the case of some of the players I was attempting to build a trusting relationship with people who were 'famous' both locally and nationally, and had achieved a degree of celebrity. It was difficult to gauge in advance whether or not *any* of the players would openly express their thoughts, but particularly those who were better known. Many players are *interviewed* by journalists mainly about their views on previous and forthcoming matches through the course of their careers. I was aware that they might view me as someone who could betray them and their trust. Interviews are relatively common occurrences for professional footballers. During these interviews the players are generally reluctant to criticise publicly their team-mates or their managers. However I did not want to recreate an interview similar in kind to those conducted by journalists. I wanted to understand their thoughts on their daily activities within the clubs and, in particular, about momentous and fateful moments during their careers so far. And in relation to these turning-points, I wanted to understand whether and how their relationships with significant others might be transformed.

Perhaps the main difference between the interviews that I conducted and those directed by journalists relates to time. The sociological interviews requested by

me were considerably longer than 'normal' interviews with journalists, which are generally swift affairs. I accepted immediately the offers from players who were prepared to be interviewed for it is unusual – perhaps lucky – to be in a position to find out intimate details about the *private* lives and thoughts of *public* figures about whom a great deal is written and speculated by fans and media alike. Insofar as I could conclude, all the players appeared openly to recount descriptions of events and express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of both a positive and negative kind. The players talked about key areas in their lives in ways which denote a high level of trust and indicate that they expected, and believed, me to have understood their positions. In fact, the opinion I formed was that the players were relatively happy to talk about their experiences. Thus, I never felt reluctant to focus questions on areas of interest about which the player may have been sensitive. I was grateful to the players for letting me 'in' on their experiences.

As I stated at the start of this section, during the interviews I gave constant thought to the sensitizing issue of my level of 'involvement', and of the dynamic interplay between *involvement* and *detachment* (Elias, 1956). During each interview I was aware that, at times, I could recall as a player experiencing certain emotions that were similar in kind (and context) to those recalled by the interviewees. To a certain degree I could empathise with the players in a 'real' sense, having had similar experiences myself. It is arguably the case that the players expressed their feeling to me because I did not present myself to them during our encounter as emotionally flat, aloof or passive. Thus, during each interview I attempted to 'take the role' of the player, to view their circumstances from their 'I'- perspective. I did not present an emotionless or neutral 'self' to the interviewees. I worked hard to try to achieve this. However, although I could empathise with them when they spoke – as I perceived it – honestly about 'painful' and stressful periods during their careers, I do not remember feeling uncomfortable about probing such intimate passages of time. I was aware that I was emotionally involved, for I reacted to their comments, yet such *involvement* did not appear to paralyse my responses to their comments, at least insofar as I was aware. But how could I be sure of this 'fact'? I recognised that I needed to consider carefully in what ways a lack of emotional involvement – of suspending

one's emotions for the duration of the interview – would affect the *interviewee*, and not solely my ability to achieve analytical distance. Might it be the case that controlling one's emotions, or suppressing particular feelings, reduces rather than enhances our capacity to understand? Might it also be the case that ignoring, suppressing or suspending one's feelings are 'emotion work' strategies that divert attention away from the cues that may ultimately enable us to understand the people we study (Finch, 1993 and Ramsey, 1996 make very similar points on this matter). Like focusing a camera to distinguish the subject from the background or tuning a radio to get rid of the static (Kleinman and Copp. 1993), we believe we have successfully set aside our feelings and can now 'see' and 'hear' with greater clarity. So, are we, in fact, attempting to control variables, such as our emotions, to convince ourselves that we are attaining an appropriate level of detachment? Attempting to be 'involved' to a relatively high degree would generate alternative, although no less relevant, types of data.

I found it difficult to be neutral towards the interviewees (see Goodwin and O'Conner, 2002). I came to like those I interviewed and was humbled by the degree to which they seemed prepared to discuss 'black days' in their careers in which they felt isolated from their colleagues, were separated from their families or considered themselves to be a burden to others. I found real interest in what they had to say because I could, in part, compare and contrast their experiences to my own (Cannon, 1992; Finch, 1993). I considered consciously and continuously the balance of power between the players and myself. Players are used to people in general, but particularly football supporters, treating them as though they are, in some ill-defined sense, 'special'. When I first began to interview players I, too, thought it necessary to consider them in this manner: that is, with due deference – not least because they do not generally agree to lengthy interviews with unknown 'outsiders'. Thus, I was aware that in the context of the interview that the power differentials were skewed in *their* favour. I thought it was necessary at least to appear to be on their side when they explained moments of injustice for them. However, as someone who has experienced to some extent passages of vulnerability in relation to fateful moments in my own career, I came to wonder whether it was the case that my capacity for clear sociological thinking may have been clouded by my own feelings of relief of not having *instrumentally* pursued a

career as professional player and of establishing an alternative career. In short, did my feelings of a relatively high degree of personal security affect my reactions to their stories or my subsequent questioning?

In the light of my experiences as a player, I was conscious when writing about the career contingencies that I did not portray the interviewees as victims. It was clear to me that I developed sympathy for a number of them, particularly those journeyman players who seemed to be so open and honest when questioned about their feelings. My experiences of interviewing led me to view interviews as social encounters and not simply passive means of gathering data (Burgess, 1984). One cannot neglect the fact that the interviewees are people with 'meaningful' social lives and treat them solely as sources of data, as such an approach would almost certainly have consequences for the types or richness of data generated. Attempting to distance or be indifferent towards one's feelings about respondents in the course of an interview does not always mean that one's head now controls the heart. It is not enough, surely, simply to state that one is striving to be 'detached'. I drew the conclusion that it was extremely difficult at times to know or have a clear understanding of whether I was achieving an appropriate balance between 'involvement' and 'detachment'. How could I, or anyone, ever be sure? It certainly seemed easier to foster analytic distance and to be neutral organising and reflecting upon the interview scripts, some time after the interview was conducted. It was much more difficult to achieve a relatively detached frame of mind in the grip of a face-to-face encounter with a respondent with whom you are attempting to build a rapport. During each interview merely being aware of one's 'involvement', and of the interplay between involvement and detachment, as Green (2000b) suggests, does not seem to be helpful or useful enough, for I considered my level of 'involvement' – if this is an appropriate concept to employ – to be in a constant state of flux.

At times, the responses of players concerned matters that were relatively *new* to me and at other times they recounted moments and events about which I had some experience and possess a value stance. It is extremely difficult, I concluded, to possess an assured or intimate understanding of one's level of involvement, and I did not want to state I had achieved an appropriate balance between involvement

and detachment based on nothing more than a self-assessment of my ability as a sociologist. To sum up these thoughts then, my ability to analyse the interview data and the degree to which I have been successful in terms of understanding the careers of professional footballers will be exhibited in the forthcoming chapters. Readers of this study will judge whether I achieved an adequate balance between involvement and detachment and whether the resulting thesis reflects a sufficient degree of reality congruence.

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[1] Parker (1996) makes connections between the occupational socialization of young apprentice-professional players and Goffman's (1961) notion of 'total institutions'.

[2] A society is a configuration of people in certain patterns of interdependence.

[3] Contemporary researchers agree that in most cases, athletes may not suffer from long-term adjustment problems to the extent to which they had been reported in the earlier literature and that, in fact, some athletes experience a sense of rebirth (Allison and Meyer, 1988; Coakley, 1983; Curtis and Ennis, 1988; Greendorfer and Blinde, 1985; Koukouris, 1994; Swain, 1991).

[4] Roderick, M.J., Waddington, I. & Parker, G. (2000). 'Playing Hurt': Managing Injuries in English Professional Football. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.35(2): 165-180

Waddington, I. Roderick, M.J. & Naik, R. Methods of appointment and qualifications of club doctors and physiotherapists in English professional football: some problems and issues. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*,2001;35:48-53.

Waddington, I & Roderick, M. The management of medical confidentiality in English professional football clubs: some ethical problems and issues. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 2002; 36: 118-123.

[5] All players interviewed were male and were experiencing (or had experienced) playing careers in English professional football clubs. This point is made at this juncture for there are now female professional players in England.

[6] See, for example, the introduction to the 1985 edition of the football classic, *The Glory Game* by Hunter Davies. In this introduction he refers to the problems of access.

[7] See Dunphy (1987) 'Only a Game' and Nelson (1996) 'Left Foot Forward'. These two examples are notable because the players in question are *journeymen* players rather than well-know Premier League stars.

Chapter Three

Attitudes to work in Professional Football

There has been a good deal of attention given to the concept of *attitude* in psychology and social psychology, yet many academics have had considerable difficulty in defining this term – it seems to have a range of meanings from the abstract/academic to everyday usage. One might suggest, therefore, that this concept is empirically ambiguous. American interactionist, Blumer (1969), for example, has suggested that this concept 'fails to point clearly to the individual instances of the class of objects to which it refers' (p.91). He goes on to state that an attitude is not perceived directly but must be pieced together through a process of inference. Later studies by social psychologists (see, for example, Eiser, 1987; Howitt *et al*, 1989; Reber, 1985) tentatively put forward the idea that what is meant by this concept are the notions of *intention* and *the tendency to act*. What is important as far as this chapter is concerned however is not the tendency to act, in and of itself, but an understanding of the social process through which the act or the behaviour is developed as well as the meanings associated with the behaviour.

As one would expect then, the meanings attached to the term *attitude* in the context of professional football are also diverse. It is clear that possessing a 'good professional attitude' is important for players, particularly in terms of career progression (Parker, 1996), though what it means to possess a *good attitude* (or for that matter a *bad attitude*) can vary considerably. For example, the meaning may vary according to the stage at which the player has reached in his career; or it may vary depending on whether the player is injured, has been dropped from the first team, or is negotiating for his next contract, and so forth. In the context of many 'professions', for example the academic profession, one is unlikely to hear a colleague regularly suggesting that a lecturer or researcher possesses a 'good professional attitude to their work'. Yet in the context of professional football this type of statement is commonplace, particularly for younger players for whom a comment such as this might be interpreted as a benchmark of progress. The patterns of social relationships identifiable in professional football clubs, for

example relations between club manager and player, relate to structures of power and to patterns of meaning. Thus, the ways in which players think and feel about their work will relate, in part, to the work-related cultural orientations of coaches and players, usually older players, with whom they have close contact, and also to their wider cultural perspectives which may be, for example, of a religious or political nature.

When a young player signs a full-time contract with a football club, he is exposed as part of a process of informal learning to what in professional football are considered appropriate attitudes and values. It is in this context that young players learn what it *means* to possess a good attitude and, of central importance to them, what behaviour elicits the reaction from others that *they* [that is the young player] have a good attitude. In short, players, particularly young players, learn that it is meaningful for them to 'display' and to be praised by significant others for 'showing' a good professional attitude. In the course of their careers, each player develops, to a greater or lesser degree, appropriate modes of thought and action which are aspects of their general orientation to their work. These modes of thought and action become ingrained over time and bound up with their conception of 'self'; that is, players build into their self-identities an understanding of what it means to be a 'good professional'.

Failure to display an appropriate attitude in the context of the football club may generate unwanted reactions from significant others and may lead to a diminished sense of 'self' for the player. Consequently, players come to perceive, form judgments, and control themselves from the standpoint shared by all the other players – what might be termed an occupational ideology – and thus deliberately, intuitively or, maybe, unconsciously, 'perform' for the particular people whose judgment of their abilities is deemed important. Once the player has incorporated the culture of his group – the culture of professional football – it becomes a frame of reference he can bring to bear upon all the situations that he encounters. In the light of these opening remarks, the objects of this chapter are firstly to describe what constitutes a good professional attitude in English professional football and secondly to examine a number of circumstances in which the 'display' of a good attitude is meaningful. Close attention is given to the social construction and

maintenance of a good professional attitude and what it means in the context of the management of injury.

Attitudes to work

There are some links between a definition of a *good professional attitude* in football and *work ethics* of the kind which are examined in the sociology of work. Sennett (1998), for example, suggests that the 'traditional' work ethic is commonly understood in terms of characteristics such as a self-disciplined use of time, hard work, an understanding of the value of delayed gratification, good grooming, and a respect for one's elders. Yet while, for Sennett, a modern work ethic has developed out of the old, and concerns teamwork, sensitivity, the ability to listen, co-operation and adaptability, the characteristics of the more traditional work ethic are most identifiable with the occupational attitudes associated with professional football. In short, a work ethic, the type of which may be located in an industrial or manual occupation, and which emphasises the values of 'masculinity, active participation, and victory' (Taylor, 1970), seems most closely to resemble the characteristics of a good attitude in professional football.

A good illustration of what, from a manager's point of view, constitutes a 'good attitude', was provided by the Liverpool manager, Gerard Houllier. Interviewed in the Sunday Times (6 December, 1998), Houllier said that the kind of players a manager wants are those who will 'fight for you once they are on that grass'. He added: 'I'll name you one – Jamie Carragher. What a professional. He might have a niggly injury, but he'll always be out there giving it some of this (Houllier smashed a fist into his other palm by way of emphasis). Former Chelsea and Scotland international, Pat Nevin, further emphasised the aggressive *masculine* dimension of a 'good attitude' in English professional football when considering the initial experiences of overseas players:

> When you arrive in England as a foreign player, the trick is to be able to deal with and adapt to certain cultural changes, not so much in everyday life but more so within football itself. Our attitudes can be very different and rather idiosyncratic ... try explaining to an intelligent foreign player

that he really ought to play on with a gaping head-wound à la Terry Butcher, unless he wants to be thought of as big girl's blouse (Nevin, 1998, p.48).

Being prepared to play while injured is thus defined as a central characteristic of a good professional attitude. However, this is only one characteristic. Parker (1996), whose ethnographic study of the football apprenticeship is shot through with references to professionalism and, in particular, 'attitude', suggests that among the immediate tasks of 'club officials' is to promote attitudes of 'acceptance, obedience and collective loyalty' (p.48). He states that at the professional club in which his study took place, an 'explicit institutional logic' existed which incorporated notions of 'personal integrity, conscientiousness, discipline and the development of a healthy "professional attitude" ' (p.200). In this connection, Parker outlines the following as essential characteristics which apprentice-professionals must demonstrate to club coaches as signs of their progress and personal maturity: 'a keen and "hardy" enthusiasm for the game, a forceful "will-to-win", an acceptance of work-place subservience, an ability to conform, and a commitment to social and professional cohesion' (1996, p.200). Parker constructs an understanding of the central values of football culture which, as he sees them, are akin to those of a 'working class shop-floor culture' (p.199).

'Hard work' and the 'desire to win'

A player who possesses a good attitude is someone who always works hard, both for himself in terms of personal development and for the team. This can be interpreted to mean someone who always tries hard to win in matches *and* in training, who is competitive and 'never says die', and who is constantly looking to improve their level of performance. Many of the players who were interviewed made reference to 'hard work' in one context or another by way of explaining what constitutes *a good attitude*. For example, one experienced player stated succinctly that a young player who possesses a good attitude is 'someone who is willing to learn. If you are a youngster anyway you've got to be willing to learn, and more importantly willing to train, and also willing to take advice from people who know. And if they do that and they work hard at their game as well then

maybe they've got half a chance'. The statement by this player, however, sells short a number of the characteristics of a good attitude in professional football. For example, Parker (1996) discusses the emphasis placed on winning in *all* competitive situations, and states that 'whilst "winning" was encouraged, it was not just a team affair, it was an issue of personal importance structured around the development of an inner drive or motivation and a burning passion to succeed in every competitive situation' (p.93). Likewise, former Arsenal and England international player, Graham Rix, formerly a youth coach at Chelsea, stresses the need for young players to be 'winners', but also to develop an aggressive cutting-edge in their approach to the game. In a television documentary which examines the life of football apprentices, he said of his young players: 'Smile, be happy in your life, but when you cross that line whether it be for training or a match, you've got to become a bastard. You've got to be a hard, tough bastard. Smile, you can have a smile on your face, but in there [points to his head] and in your heart and your stomach, you've got to be as tough as nails' ('Football Dreams', Channel 4, 7/7/97)[1].

The problems as far as many young players are concerned are twofold. In the first instance, young players are faced with the problem of demonstrating to significant others that they possess a 'burning passion' to win, and displaying the attributes of a 'hard, tough bastard'. Many players achieve this by, for example, working hard in matches and in training, by being enthusiastic and always wanting the ball, by injecting a sense of urgency into their play, and by being outwardly aggressive when tackling and heading and in other contact situations. The second and related problem however concerns the 'informal' nature of the criteria which define a 'good attitude'. From one situation to the next and from one player to another, these criteria are often applied in ad hoc and arbitrary ways by coaches and managers and can lead, for example, to the generation of jealousy among team-mates and the issue of managerial 'favouritism' (See Parker, 1996a, Chapter Four).

The data collected for this study suggest that younger players (apprentices and young professionals) are made more aware of the need to 'display' a good attitude and, in part, this point is borne out by a case of negligence brought against

Sunderland football club by a former player. This particular incident was recorded in a court hearing between Keiron Brady, the player in question, and Sunderland Football Club (Queens Bench Division, 2 April 1998) who were being sued on the grounds of medical negligence. The precise condition that was discovered during operative treatment was the result of a blockage of the Popliteal artery in Brady's right leg. Popliteal entrapment syndrome is a very rare condition. The player in question claimed that the club failed to take appropriate action when he reported pain in his right leg. It is alleged by the player that complaints and apparent difficulties in training were attributed to an *attitude* problem – in short, the player is accused by a coach of possessing a 'bad' attitude to training. The player gave a witness statement which reads as follows:

> By this stage Malcolm Crosby [the youth coach] was telling me that I had an attitude problem and in particular in relation to training. I didn't really realize there was something physically wrong. I just wasn't able to keep up all the time. From time to time I would try and explain to him in training sessions why I was unable to keep up but he did not want to listen and told me it was to do with my attitude. Over the following month his opinion about my attitude seemed to harden (Queens Bench Division, 2 April 1998).

In this particular case, the player is accused of not liking hard work, particularly stamina running and weights. The coach in his statement said that he did not believe the full extent of the injury to the player and, hence, one might conclude that he thought the player was exaggerating the full extent of the pain in order to excuse himself from hard training. Hypothetically speaking, had the player possessed the 'right attitude', he would have *soldiered on* without complaint. Thus, in this instance, the player was stigmatised for possessing a bad attitude. Moreover, his actions might be said to have the unintended consequence of acting as a reminder to his playing colleagues of the types of behaviour that elicit unwanted reactions from significant others.

A more senior player suggested in interview that early on in his career the club had appointed a new manager who was unfamiliar with the younger professionals,

as is usually the case. By way of explaining his acceptance with the new manager, this player described a pre-season friendly in which he was played 'out of position':

> I remember he did the pre-season and he put me on against a non-league club away from home, and he put me on at right back, right wing-back, which I'd never played in. But I ended up doing all right. I think he could tell I was an honest lad and I tried my nuts off basically, but I was never going to be a right wing-back, that's for sure. But I think he liked me because I had a go.

Many other players spoke similarly of having to '(re)prove themselves' to new managers, even if they were established professionals, and suggested that one way in which this can be achieved is by demonstrating a good professional attitude to the game. Another player recounted a situation in which, despite having been out with an injury for some time, he felt he had contributed to the success of his team that season and had, as he put it, 'earnt the right' to have his contract extended for one year. The management delayed their decision in terms of his request suggesting that they would reconsider an extension to his contract in pre-season. He set himself a number of targets during the close season in addition to the weight targets set by the club physiotherapist. The following extract is an attempt by this player to provide an example of his professionalism:

> I was going to do a lot of work during this summer because I wanted to be better in the second division than I was in the third division, and obviously to keep my place in the team. I was quite friendly with the assistant manager at [this club] and at various stages during the summer I was saying to him that I'd been working hard. I really built myself up. I then bumped into him in the States and I said, 'I've been working really hard. Gary [the physiotherapist] sets these targets for weights, you don't know what my one was do you?' He said, 'Yes, 75 kilograms seems to ring a bell', and I was already passed that weight and I thought, 'Oh great, I'm going to get fined when I get back. I'm over-weight'. I actually went back and he stuck me on the scales and he said, 'Grief, you've done well'. And

there were two or three of the other players stood next to me and they said, 'You've put some weight on haven't you? But you must have had a good summer, there's not an ounce of fat on you'. So straight away I got the right response and the manager then said I want to see you this afternoon and I was thinking, 'hold on, what's going on, he *is* going to fine me'. There were one or two of the lads who had put on an extra pound and I'd gone through the barrier, the target that he'd set me. He pulled me and he said, 'I can see you've worked your socks off this summer. You look great. You know you mentioned about a contract, we'll give you that contract, we'll give you an extra year'. I thought, I got my rewards for the hard work that I've done.

This player thought the awarding of his 'extra year' by the management was justly deserved and granted on the grounds of his dedication and hard work and, like many of the responses by players to questions concerning their attitude, his comments implicitly address his degree of commitment to professional football. Perhaps the most adequate response however was provided by a player who, when asked to describe what it is to have a good professional attitude, found it necessary to provide details of his up-bringing in order to explain his 'professional' approach to the game. His informative response incorporates many relevant attributes associated with a 'good attitude' including a competitive spirit, hard work, the will to improve, and a disciplined lifestyle. He said:

> I think I must have had some sort of natural ability to get where I was, but ... there were loads of lads who were better players than me, loads of players got signed up for clubs who played in teams that I was in. I was a steady player who could do a bit, do a few things. I had some pace, that was probably one of my biggest assets. I had some pace and I would work hard. I could run about and I had this enthusiasm and I had this pace which would always show up a bit, maybe get me noticed. Technically I was one footed, right footed. I couldn't keep the ball up loads of times and I didn't have an exceptional touch. I wasn't over gifted in that way but I could do most things quite competently like most other players who got spotted. I just kept on wanting to play. When we got to fifteen or sixteen some of the

lads started going out for drinks and that but I think, for some reason I was never interested in that type of thing and although I played football with them lads who were, I think the studies helped me as well because I was still interested in doing A Levels and in polytechnic. I suppose that's how your family brings you up and everything, with good morals and things as they should be, catholic boy rules. I'd still go to church every Sunday, still do. I'm not a religious freak or anything. It's just like a discipline sort of thing. It's just them attitudes were there where I would always go to training, I would always turn up to training, never missed, always there twice a week. I would always be there for games, and then once you got into the team I was always competitive and wanted to win and that.

This player decided against signing as an apprentice for the third division club who had offered him a YT contract, and chose instead to study for a sports science degree at polytechnic. The club, he said, were keen for him to continue playing nevertheless, so whilst studying, he continued to play in their reserve team insofar as it was possible for him to do so. He said that whilst studying, a psychology of sport lecturer had expressed surprise at the fact that, in general, professional footballers didn't keep training diaries and therefore were unable to remember what training they had undertaken. At this point the player decided to go about his training in a more systematic manner. To initiate his new approach to training he bought for himself a 'proper football' and set himself some targets:

I went and bought this ball and like I said to myself, I'm going to go out for an hour every night, I was still doing exams, but I had to fit this in and I'll do an hour every night. We had this field just by us and it was just a case of going out. I bought a ball and just went out and did drills and all I did was work on dribbling with my right foot and my left foot. I was just dribbling round cones, dead basic stuff, but my touch and my control and everything improved and I just did it religiously every single day. I found the time to go and do it, and the year after I think it just helped my confidence and everything. I was more comfortable on the ball. I already had the attitude and the competitiveness, I had a bit of pace and it was that next year when I broke into [my club's] first team. I had a bit of luck with

injuries to players as well. I was able to take the chance and ... I think it was just the work ethic I think, I can't say it was down to me ... but it was something you had been brought up with, family and that, an attitude that had been ingrained. There was a point where I realised that I needed to go and do this and this and this to do with work and I was disciplined enough to go and do it.

The player eventually signed as a professional for this third division team, but, as he explains, he continued to practice and develop his skills in addition to the scheduled training sessions at his club:

I would always go in earlier, I'd go out to the training ground and kick a ball against a wall. I realised that I had the basic things and that I needed to work on my left foot which was terrible, and I just used to kick the ball against a wall and keep the ball up and just basic things used to improve. And I used to go and do an hour before and an hour after and I thought I must be getting a head start on everybody else, none of the other lads are doing it at the club, nobody else at other clubs would be doing it. ... If things take a little bit of a dip in form and that, I'd go and do a bit of extra work.

The player has since been transferred twice, most recently to a first division club for over one million pounds. When asked if he continued to train as hard, he replied:

Yes, the thing is now that, when things are going well is to do extra training, do extra crossing. When you go home a couple of times a week, I'd just get the ball out and practise the basic things and it's probably not the same ... some people have different attitudes to me, they are more self-confident and that, but me, I still keep a diary and if I look back on a Friday and if I see I've done all my training right down to an extra weights session, I've done a bit of extra running, been out with the ball a couple of times, if my training diary is full up then I think, 'Right, I've done my

work there's no reason why I shouldn't have a good game tomorrow. It's all in there, I can go and do it'. I think for me, that is attitude.

This account is sociologically informative as the player highlights in detail *the development of* the attitude of perseverance he brings to bear to training and preparation for matches – an attitude that may appear as a very personal mental process. Yet, the diary of training he steadfastly maintains serves not only as a reminder of his training schedule, but, perhaps more importantly, to reinforce his sense of self-belief that he is fully prepared for his next match. Thus the significance of, and the meaning invested in, the diary lies in the fact that his updating and review of it leads him to think that he has an edge over other players, and hence to a reinforcement of his sense of self.

All the cases presented so far have confirmed that it is necessary for players to demonstrate and to prove to others that they possess the right attitude to the game. For players to think in their minds that they have worked hard and performed well in a competitive situation – in short, for them to think they possess the right attitude – is, on its own, meaningless by-and-large in terms of career progression. Players need to display and make their attitude to the game evident to others in a manner that is acknowledged and approved. A good attitude is not a characteristic that players are born with, unlike potential levels of aerobic fitness, agility or peripheral vision. Rather, it is a quality which is socially constructed and reinforced, and the praise received from a significant other by players who display a good attitude serves directly to underscore their sense of self-esteem and heighten their self-confidence.

Individual progress versus team success: 'dog-eat-dog'

Another integral characteristic of a 'good attitude' is the 'willingness' of a player to sacrifice personal achievement and glory for the good of the team. This characteristic is complex sociologically as, whilst players recognize that it is important that they *should be seen to be* 'team players', many have spoken (both during interviews for this study and in the national newspapers) of the personal conflicts that arise in the context of their daily activities. These 'individual versus

club' conflicts surface mostly when players are unable *to play*, either because of injury or when they are left out of the starting eleven. For some players this will constrain them to engage in a degree of, what Goffman (1959) would term, 'impression management' as they are expected to behave in a manner that contributes, first and foremost, to the morale of the team. Magee (1998) in his study of international labour migration in professional football examines in part what he terms 'dressing room culture'. He quotes one of his players as suggesting that English football is characterized in terms of a 'dog-eat-dog' way of life. In short, he suggests, players 'look after themselves' (p.129). In his interview for this study, one inexperienced player from a lower division club confirmed these sentiments by expressing the opinion that: 'At the end of the day, you know, everyone is in it for themselves. And quite often players would shit on each other, you know, if it came to it'. When asked how other players reacted to him throughout a period in which he was rehabilitating from a long-term injury, an experienced Premiership player replied by drawing attention to the self-centred focus which for him characterises many players. He said:

> I mean, at the end of the day players are very selfish people because they know ... At the end of the day, just as long as they're fit ... I mean, they say 'hello' to you and 'how are you doing?' But I know because I'm a player myself, that they will give you so much concern but they're not going to lose any sleep over it. You know what I mean? They're not *that* bothered. Players think exactly what I expect them to think.

The clearest and most common examples of personal conflict occur when players are dropped or unfit for selection, and are forced to watch their team play without them. In these respects, the attitudes and behaviour of players reflect the importance attached to *playing* as a central value in football culture. 'Active participation' in matches seems to be the context through which the identities – that is, the highly masculine identities – of players are given meaning. This is probably what Goffman had in mind in his analysis of 'action' and the people who want and need a 'piece of it' (1967, p.181). Professional football is arguably a work 'role' that provides a capacity for demonstrating the characteristics of, for example, courage and confidence for establishing 'self' through such 'action'. As

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unemployment in general may lead to a diminished sense of self, particularly among men (Morgan, 1992), likewise, having to watch and not participate in matches may foster a loss of sense of importance and significance as well as high levels of anxiety for professional footballers. Unsurprisingly, all players stated that they vehemently disliked missing matches and, not untypically, one described himself as 'the world's worst watcher'. A number of players, however, distinguished between being *unfit* and *dropped*. An experienced player, like other more senior players who were interviewed, emphasised not only the differences that may exist, but also the need for players to try to remain positive:

> I think its the hardest thing ever for a player when they're not fit. There are times when I can accept it if the team is playing and I can't play because I'm injured. There are times when you have to accept that you're not going to play because you're injured: end of story. I think there's nothing worse than when you're fit and your not playing because basically the manager is saying that you don't fit into his plans, and that is harder to take. I think you have got to be strong enough minded when you are injured to say, 'Yes, I'm injured. I have got to do my best to get myself right', and that's it. You have to have tunnel vision to except what you've got, and get on with it.

A young, second division player confirmed the difficulties experienced by players who are unfit and therefore unable to take part in matches. When asked to comment on how he felt having to watch rather than play in games *when injured*, he said:

> **Player**: Oh I don't like watching matches. I hate it. You get it stuck in you mind that someone's in your place, doing better than you, and you're not going to get back in the team.
> **MR**: Does that lead to a conflict of interests?
> **Player**: It does sometimes, yes. I think it does with every player. I don't think other players would admit it, but it certainly does, yes. I mean, I don't think you blatantly want your team to lose, but you wouldn't mind

them scraping a 1-0, and not playing very well and your man having a nightmare.

According to former Scotland international, Pat Nevin (1998, p.24), however, the 'consummate, "right-thinking" professional' always has the 'good of the team' uppermost in his heart. Likening *his* approach to this type of 'model' professional, Nevin boasts about his upbringing as a member of the Celtic Boys' Club in Glasgow and their over-riding philosophy that laid stress on the 'oneness of the team'. He claims to have been amazed when he signed as a professional to discover that 'not everyone always has the same feelings towards the team' (p.25). Parker (1996) suggests too that an enhancement of team collectivity was something which the trainees in his study had to 'demonstrate' if they were going to succeed yet, he claims, for the older, second year boys, 'instances of managerial partiality and selectivity had shown them that the promotion of group cohesion was more often a matter of "official" lip-service than everyday action'. Hence, Parker (1996) states: 'Experiences of schoolboy football and YT selection had taught trainees that, in reality, being a good "team player" and showing consideration for the welfare of others were relatively unprofitable ventures in terms of occupational success' (p.111).

Former player, Eamon Dunphy (1987) retells perhaps the most revealing account of this type of conflict of interest in his classic diary of a professional footballer's season, 'Only a Game'. Dunphy considers himself to be a regular first team player for Millwall football club but is left out of the team for a forthcoming match. He finds out about his omission from the first team when he is selected to play for the reserve team in a training match and, filled with a mixture of anger and hurt, claims his first reaction was to 'walk out'. Dunphy agrees finally with the wishes of the manager for him to be thirteenth man for the forthcoming match, and in the following quote he explains his behaviour and actions among his teammates on the day of the match:

> So we went up to Sheffield. I wasn't on the bench, I went as thirteenth man. You go into the dressing-room before the game, and you smile and say 'All the best, lads'. What does that mean? If they do well you stay out.

And when they get beaten, as we did last night, what do you do? You act. Because you can't come in with a big smile all over your face saying 'Great. Now you've been beaten I can get back in'. Everybody else is sick. But you aren't. You are pleased. So you come in and make faces; pretend that you are sick like the rest of them. But everyone knows that you are acting (Dunphy, 1987, p.100).

Dunphy goes on to describe his personal conflicts whilst watching his team-mates during the game in the following way:

But while they are out there what am I doing? I'm sitting in the stand, wanting them to lose, but unable to show it. Because there are people around, I've got to pretend to want them to win. I can't jump up in the air when Sheffield score. Which I want to do. And when Millwall score I am sick, but I have to jump up in the air. And there is this terrible conflict the whole time. And it is the same for everyone who is dropped.

You are always pleased when the lads have been beaten, because it means you are a candidate again. You are sick for the lads, of course, but your predominant emotion is delight (Dunphy, 1987, p.100-101).

This account is revealing in terms of the way in which Dunphy feels constrained to behave in a manner that is 'appropriate', and which conforms to the cultural norms of a professional footballer who is watching his team compete, rather than being actively involved. Even though he claims that all the other players know that he is 'acting', he still feels that it is appropriate to behave as expected, yet in a manner that contradicts his true feelings. Dunphy is not 'forced' to behave in this way. However, for him not to conform to the expectations of others would be tantamount to admitting that he possessed a 'bad attitude', and it is likely that if this pattern of behaviour repeated itself he may become stigmatised, at least in the short term. So, rather than be discredited by his manager and team-mates, Dunphy engages in what is commonly understood as 'impression management' (Goffman, 1959). This point highlights one of the central properties of the 'good attitude': namely, that it can be thought of as a powerful form of *social control* in the context of professional football.

There have been only a few studies which have focused on the structures of control within football culture (Tomlinson, 1983; Parker, 1996; Giulianotti, 1999), and what studies have been undertaken have emphasised the traditional/authoritarian management styles that are closely associated with professional football. Giulianotti (1999, p.109) refers to the manager's 'corporeal control over the football institution' and writes of the ways in which the daily lives of players are constrained in terms of, for example, diet and sexual relations. Tomlinson (1983) examines the internal structures of control suggesting that the 'professional football club promotes in its players an attitude of general impotence, and structurally delimits any potential that the group of players might have for expansion and growth' (p.165). Yet none of the studies examine in any detail the *orientation to work* which players develop as professionals or the ways in which this orientation constrains their approach to the game and their daily lives, even if they do not recognise these constraints.

The circumstances which constrain players to behave in a manner that is expected rather than in a way which reflects their actual emotions are structured along a number of lines of which the following might be recognised as central. It might be said that players are more likely to engage in a degree of impression management (Goffman, 1959) when they think they can be more easily replaced by other members of their squad; when the squad members are in close and frequent contact with management and coaching staff (and in some cases medical staff); and when the players with whom they have close and often intense relationships share, or need also to conform to, the same culture of football – that is, they too are constrained to display a 'good attitude'. The network of relationships which typify professional football clubs are 'closed' to outsiders, relatively speaking, with a homogenous culture that tends to be mutually reinforcing.

In this chapter, thus far, there has been an examination of what it means to possess a 'good attitude' in professional football. The focus has been on the work-place culture in which players begin to adopt, deliberately or unconsciously, the mannerisms, attitudes and behaviours that they perceive among the senior professionals at their clubs, or which their managers and coaches reinforce. For

example, players are expected to work hard and to manifest characteristics such as a 'positive' frame of mind, a forceful will-to-win as well as an unquestioning loyalty to the team. In many of these respects, however, impression management plays a significant role, particularly when the player's position in the starting eleven is threatened. Parker (1996a) suggests, for instance, that an obvious example of impression management he observed occurred when some of the youth trainees 'denied injury in order to remain eligible for youth team selection, knowing only too well that they would be incapable of performing to their maximum potential' (p.111). He goes on to say that it was common for players to deny pain and injuries if it meant preserving their position in the team, and that this type of behaviour generated 'increased favour in terms of managerial preference' (p.111). This case in point highlights two aspects of the culture of professional football: that this type of behaviour stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of being a good team player, and that it underscores the emphasis placed on aggressive masculine styles of play which 'good professionals', but particularly younger professionals, are required to display.

Masculinity, pain and injury[2]

There have been a number of studies which have examined men in occupational settings (for example, Cockburn, 1983; Collinson, 1988, 1992; Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Willis, 1977). Unlike earlier 'classic' studies of work (Lupton, 1963; Walker and Guest, 1952; Whyte, 1956), these studies have explored specifically the social construction of 'men' and the specific implications for the reproduction of men and masculinity of being, for example, a manager and of working on an assembly line and so forth. Collinson and Hearn (1996) argue that a key issue which reinforces and structures 'masculinity'[3] is the deep-rooted nature of economic class inequalities, sub-cultures and identities that continue to be reproduced in and through routine work practices. Connell (1995) suggests also that 'economic circumstances and organisational relationships enter into the making of masculinity at the most intimate level' (p.36). Using the work of Donaldson (1991) as his point of departure, Connell states that hard labour in all-male working environments (for example in factories and mines) literally 'uses up the workers' bodies' and that this 'destruction, a proof of the toughness of work

and of the worker, can be a method of demonstrating masculinity' (p.36)[4]. According to Connell (1995): 'This happens not because manual work is necessarily destructive, but because it is done in a destructive way under economic pressure and management control' (p.36). What is true of workplaces in general, is also true of professional football clubs in England.

Thus, playing with pain or when injured may be viewed as a 'routine work practice' in the context of professional football. All the players interviewed for this study indicated that they had at some time *carried* injuries, denied or masked pain in order to play, or had concealed injuries from significant others. The context within which a player is constrained (i.e., pressured), or may choose to play hurt, can vary from one division to the next and can be dependent upon factors such as the degree to which the player has 'established' himself; the stage of the season and the significance of the match; the number of 'fit' players available to the manager; the extent of internal competition for places, and so forth. Yet, the tendency for players to play hurt and to risk further injury cannot be understood simply in terms of these 'external factors' (Messner, 1992), for there is a powerful motivating force working in conjunction with these external factors which makes it likely that players will choose to play hurt: namely, the internal structure of masculine identity. In their study of ballet dancers, Turner and Wainwright (2003) propose that their tolerance of pain is a function of the social solidarity of the ballet dancer and the professional discipline that forms the dancing identity. Like footballers, an injury to a ballet dancer can be fatal to their career. Turner and Wainwright (2003) argue that, for dancers, pain and injury are marked by a ballet culture that is committed to the notion that 'the show must go on' (p.272). They suggest that because ballet dancers have a calling to dance, there is a reluctance to admit the presence of an injury. Recent writing on pain and injury in sport describes how male sport is an institution through which masculine identities are constructed and reconstructed (Curry, 1993; Messner, 1992; Young, White and McTeer, 1994). In this research, the tolerance of pain and injury is valued by many athletes as masculinizing. Similarly, in the context of professional football, learning to play with pain or when injured is an important aspect of the construction of masculine identities; it is a means of making an impact on

managers and coaches and a convenient way for players to demonstrate their 'attitude' to the game.

It is important, therefore, that players should have, or at least should 'display' an appropriate *attitude* towards playing with pain and carrying injuries; by the same token, those who are not prepared to play through pain and injury are likely to be stigmatised as not having the right attitude, as malingerers or, more bluntly, as 'poofters'. These points were brought out very clearly by one experienced player who summed up what having a 'good attitude' entails in the following way:

> We had a player, I won't mention his name, but he has gone to [another club] now, and he had a fantastic attitude as in, he used to play constantly through injuries and they would get worse and worse. He'd be injured one week and ... two weeks later he'd have the injury again. When you get a dead leg, you know, if you start running on it in the first twenty-four hours, you've got no chance, it can get worse ... he'd play through to show the management that he had a fantastic attitude. But he was constantly injured. Constantly injured.

When asked how managers react to this kind of behaviour on the part of their players he replied:

> They think it's fantastic. Brilliant. He's out there dying for the club. Dying for the club. Now, we have another player here who's from [another country] and his attitude is any little niggle, 'That's it, I'm not playing'. Even in warm-ups before games he walks off. Everyone's attitude towards him is 'He's a poofter, he doesn't want to play, no heart'. You know, the manager says in front of the players, 'Look at him over there; he's pulled out of the game again. There's a big game coming up ... so he's pulled out'. It might be because he has genuinely got an injury. Only the player knows. But his title is that he's a f*****g wuss, you know, he hasn't got the right attitude. But if you go out with an injury and you play for ninety minutes and it's doing you more harm than good, you know, you're Braveheart, you're brilliant.

Players are willing to play with pain, if only, at times, to display an appropriate attitude[5]. There are times when players have doubts about their fitness, yet are unable to express their doubts and feel constrained to say to managers (and sometimes to physiotherapists) that they are keen to play. For example, one senior Premiership player expressed the way in which he felt under pressure to agree to a pain-killing injection to enable him to play in a forthcoming match. When asked whether he was given any options about whether or not to have the injection, the player responded as follows:

> Not really. I mean ... you are under a bit of pressure to take it [the injection] because you think, what does the manager say if I don't take it. I'm under pressure to take it, because if I don't take it, he probably looks at me as if you are a bit soft or you don't really want to go through it, or you don't want it badly enough. And you are put in that position sometimes. I think it's not so bad these days, although I've seen enough here to suggest otherwise.

When asked whether this situation occurs regularly for players at his club, the player replied: 'It definitely does here, which I think is a bad thing really. I think here, if you are not fit, and if the physiotherapist hasn't got you fit within four weeks, he thinks along the lines of injecting you'.

Without exception all the players interviewed said that they could not stand to miss games, and would, if necessary, risk 'carrying' an injury. One former player, now retired and suffering from arthritis, described how he frequently played while injured and, recalling one particular game in which he played with a pre-existing injury, proudly claimed to be the only captain who had limped to the center circle to toss up with the opposing captain before the start of the game. Another senior player described how, over several months, he had played with pain from a knee injury and, in attempting to compensate for the knee injury by changing his running style, had suffered one injury after another. The following is an extract from the transcript of the interview with this player:

Player: Because you've got something that hurts, you are aware of it and you compensate naturally, probably unconsciously, and I was running in a different way. Changing my running style developed new injuries, so on top of one, when you are playing with an injury, then all of a sudden, you are playing with two injuries and then, you know, you get one right and then you've got another one... you never give yourself enough time, I never give myself enough time.

MR: Can you describe what it was like playing through these injuries?

Player: You get familiar with it, any pain ... if you don't step back and ... get out of the scenario, you kind of get used to the s**t, I'm afraid, and that's what I was doing. I was compensating in other areas. I twisted my ankle in February last year, and that went on top of my knee and I'm compensating and then all of a sudden I'm getting bad toes. I'm getting bad toes 'cos I'm changing my running style ... and then all of a sudden my back's playing me up.

MR: How did you feel during this period?

Player: It was pretty depressing ... when you are getting up in the morning and you can't walk and all of a sudden you think to yourself 'Jesus, I've got to go to work today'. You know, it's like any job, if you can't do your job ... so it was kind of one thing on top of another and it's not a good feeling ... It's frustrating, but you get used to the pain and ... you keep on playing with the pain. That's the thing, you never say 'No, I'm not doing it'.

Later in the interview, he emphasised the continual pressure to return to play as quickly as possible: 'We never gave it enough time. We were always chasing our tail with every injury that I've ever had. You know, there's always been a cup semi-final, or there's been a quarter-final in the cup or there's another [international] game ... you never give yourself time'.

Their willingness to play through pain and to be seen to possess a good attitude can lead players to mask their injuries in order to be fit for selection. In some circumstances, players will conceal the injury out-right if they feel they can 'get away with it'. However, this is usually only the case with minor injuries, for example, groin strains and small muscle tears and strains. For other players, being

willing to play when injured may involve being prepared to have a pain-killing injection (usually local anaesthetics), a cortisone injection, or taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (for example, Ibuprofen and Voltarol) the use of which is widespread in football clubs. For example, one player stated that at his club, 'they give out profen like there's no tomorrow'. When asked how he coped with pain, another player, whose remarks were similar to many of the players interviewed, said: 'It was a case of grin and bare it really. I must have had tablets to sort of help it as well. It was just one of those stages where I think, "get on with it" '. In his autobiography, former Republic of Ireland international, Tony Cascarino, discusses his use of drugs which ensure he is 'fit' for selection. He reveals: 'I've had two cortisone injections already this season. For the last eight years I've taken anti-inflammatory pills before and after every game. The pills play havoc with my stomach and scorch my arse with diarrhoea but when the ball hits the back of the net and the crowd chants my name, it seems a small price to pay' (2000, p.6). Players are given pain-killing injections to a lesser degree and, usually, only at critical points in the season. Some club doctors refuse outright to inject players using cortisone, whereas others seem more prepared to think in terms of injections, especially local anaesthetics, as another tool in their armoury. Players are not usually consulted with regard to the implications of having an injection, are offered little advice, and are rarely asked whether or not they are happy to be injected. One experienced player said that he had known a small number of players at his club who had refused to be injected and they had ended up in conflict with the manager. He went on to suggest that it would take 'a lot of bottle for someone to say no' if that course of action was proposed.

The dilemma for players of whether or not to be injected draws attention to a complex aspect of the attitude to playing with pain. Most of the players interviewed had been injected enabling them to play; yet all players spoke of their resistance to painkillers of all description (that is, injections and pills). One player, for example, spoke of a situation in which he had been injected twice before every game from late December until the end of the season in May. This player said that while he would avoid taking painkillers wherever possible – and at another point in the interview even claimed that he 'did not believe in them' – he rationalised his actions by suggesting that the stakes are a bit higher at Premiership level. In

reality, this player expresses a dilemma faced by many others in that he understands that masking pain will not cure the clinical problem, but the decision not to accept a pain-killing injection may lead, at best, to his temporary omission from the team and, at worst, to him being stigmatised as though he 'does not want it enough'. Thus, when asked whether players were able to make these decisions for themselves, the same player, as if to underscore his own attitude to playing with pain, said: 'Other players wouldn't actually play, they wouldn't carry injuries. They'd just say "no". *But they could play if they really wanted to*'.

There are considerable pressures on players to play with pain and injury, and the evidence suggests that most are willing and happy to conceal or mask an injury in order to remain in the starting line-up, even if this means having a pain-killing injection. Former Division One player, Alan Gowling, suggests that 'the club may want the [injured] player to play so desperately that they put pressure on the player to play. This pressure is generally not direct, but the player is placed in such a position that to refuse to play could have awkward repercussions in the future, or he may be made to feel that he is letting the lads down (a cardinal sin!)' (1974, p208). However, as previously stated, one cannot explain these pressures in terms of 'external factors' alone for there are also considerable pressures on players to maintain and reinforce their masculine identities. For example, throughout this discussion players have suggested that to appear to be unwilling to play with pain or when injured may lead their manager (physiotherapist or playing colleagues) to accuse them of being 'soft', of having 'no heart', of 'not really wanting it', or of being 'a poofter'. In the light of these comments, one might suggest that it is important that players develop 'appropriate' attitudes not only towards their occupation in general, but also towards their own bodies (see Messner, 1990 and 1992).

The importance of developing a 'good attitude' is impressed on young players from the moment they have contact with the coaching staff at clubs. This point is confirmed by the ethnographic research of Parker (1996) who, whilst avoiding a direct discussion of the ways in which youth trainees cope with injury, highlights the significance of apprentice footballers being seen to possess or to develop a 'good professional attitude'. However, many players in this study spoke of the

differences between being established (that is, a first team regular), and of being young and inexperienced. For example, when questioned with regard to his reasons for carrying an injury, one player rationalised his thoughts in terms of the stage at which he had reached in his career. He offered the following explanation:

> You continue [to play in pain] possibly because you want to be playing and I wanted to play. I'd done really well the year before. I felt I was on a roll and I didn't want to miss out on anything, plus you are young and I think you are more susceptible to people influencing you then as well. You always tend to think, the younger you are, that the older players that you talk to are the ones who know the best, and you tend to listen to them. But it isn't always right, and you should sometimes be strong enough to turn round and say that something isn't right. I need something doing and I need it done now.

The recurring suggestion is that young players are vulnerable to influence from significant others to a much greater degree than older, established players. This is not surprising. Further to this, however, young players are not only vulnerable, but are placed in positions whereby the act of not agreeing with advice would make them appear to others as disrespectful and as though they were not prepared to listen, and also that they didn't really *want it* enough. These types of exchanges are used as evidence by managers and youth coaches to draw conclusions with regard to the attitudes and characteristics of young players in particular. Consequently, many players referred to situations earlier in their careers when they had accepted unquestioningly the advice of others, from physiotherapists and older players. One player, who had been advised to continue playing until the end of the season before undergoing an operation on his cartilage, said that at that time he did not have any doubts about whether he should have played on. He said: 'I was only sort of 19 or 20 years old. I think at that stage you are pretty much guided by what your physio says to you ... whatever the physio says, you take as gospel'. The same player then referred to a situation in which he had been offered an injection in order to play. He responded to the question of whether or not he was happy to have a pain-killing injection in the following way:

If it got me through a game I'd go ahead and do it. As I say, at that stage, at that time in my career, I just wanted to play and, if you are a young player you are pretty much guided by the physio. If he says take this tablet, the players take it, you go ahead and take it. If they say we think you should do this, the players will do it.

Further confirmation of the way in which players are exposed to attitudes to playing with pain in the course of their early careers was offered by two players, both of whom had signed 'late' with clubs – that is, in their early twenties. Both players had no experience of daily life or of routine work practices in professional football. One player, when asked whether he felt under pressure to return quickly suggested that initially, 'it was just the physio telling me what to do. I'd never had an injury. I didn't know what to do. You just do what the physio advises'. The other player said: 'It was strange for me really because I'd been playing non-league. I had had little injuries but I had not really had a serious injury. And so, I didn't really know what sort of, if you like, what your pain threshold should be. I didn't really know, so I was training probably for two months with the problem'. Both players spoke of the way in which they had changed since their initial experiences. However, the changes to which they both referred were not connected with their approach to coping with pain, but in terms of handling, and managing, the social relations bound up with their experience of being injured.

Players describe individually different circumstances in which they respond to pain and injury, yet throughout the research it is clear that the responses of players to pain are predictable on the basis of group membership (that is, as professional footballers), and that the *meanings* ascribed to injury are shared to greater or lesser degrees by all players as an aspect of the culture of football. In the process of understanding and interpreting what it means for them to be injured, players do not invent meanings, but rather are provided with meanings generated via direct experience or in the course of interaction among other players – in short, the inculcation of a 'good attitude' is not a passive social process. It is the organisation of social relationships in football clubs which sustains, enforces, and reinforces conformity to particular attitudes to playing with pain and risking injury.

Concluding comments

This examination has attempted to convey the significance and meaning invested in what, in professional football, is regarded as a 'good attitude'. The central difficulties of this task have been brought about by the ambiguous nature of the term and by the variety of ways in which the term is applied by coaches, managers and players in the context of football clubs. The respective attitudes and values of the players reflect the informal cultural norms – which emphasise the values of masculinity, active participation and victory – that may guide behaviour and feelings, and are an aspect of the taken-for-granted perspective in terms of how the game ought to be played and on how players are expected to conduct themselves. Failure to conform to the values can, for young players in particular, threaten their career prospects, and for all players there may be unintended consequences in terms of status within the club. These values are embedded in professional football culture and for players they are unavoidable. In a number of instances, the internalisation and belief in these values may help motivate players to confront risky circumstances (for example playing in pain and when injured) and while some players may experience fear or even anger, conformity to the informal but institutionalised norms may prevent them from displaying the real emotions they experience. In this manner, players reinforce the existing values and norms in professional football and maintain their hard won status and sense of self among team-mates, coaches and managers.

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[1] Channel 4, 7/7/97. 'Football Dreams' was a television documentary that followed the fortunes of a number of apprentice professional footballers who were 'chasing the big-time' at Chelsea Football Club.

[2] This chapter is an expansion of a number of ideas contained in the following report: 'Managing Injuries in English Professional Football' (Waddington, Roderick and Parker, 1998)

[3] Parker (1996) argues that in order to understand sporting practices, one must acknowledge the social construction of differing masculine identities. He argues, *pace* Carrigan *et al* (1985), that one must recognise the existence of a multiplicity of masculinities according to the diverse cultural values in place at any given time.

[4] See also, in this connection, the work of Nash (1979), who examines the plight of workers in Bolivian tin mines.

[5] This idea is similar in kind to the discussion developed by Wacquant (1995). In the following quote Wacquant (1995) discusses the attitude to their profession developed by boxers: 'The fistic trade puts a high premium on physical toughness and the ability to withstand – as well as dish out – pain and bodily harm. The specific honour of the pugilist, like that of the ancient gladiator, consists in refusing to concede and kneel down. One of the visible outward signs of the much-revered quality called 'heart' said to epitomize the authentic boxer is the capacity not to bow under pressure, to 'suck it up' and keep on fighting, no matter what the physical toll' (p.496).

Chapter Four

Uncertainty and football injuries

Alan Mullery celebrated his thirtieth birthday on 23 November 1971. Not that he had anything to celebrate. By then he'd been out of action for a whole month. But long before that he'd obviously been struggling ... He'd been playing all season with stomach pains. He'd hoped he could play it out, that the pains would just fade away, but they hadn't. He'd been using a corset for some time ... This had helped slightly at first, but then the pains had grown worse ...

... For several weeks he had deep heat treatment twice a day at the ground. The diagnosis was strained pelvic muscles. An X-ray had shown no break. There was no damage whatsoever to be seen. It was the sort of injury footballers hate most - where the cause isn't known, the injury can't be seen and there is no known time scale of treatment (Davis, 1996, p.168).

This extract describes a common problem for all professional footballers who sustain injuries. The particular injury discussed above is described as being the kind which most players hate the most. The precise reason why Alan Mullery's circumstances are described in such severe terms is due to the number of *uncertainties* which are bound up in this situation which presents problems both to him, and to significant others. For example, if Mullery is uncertain how long the injury will take to heal, he cannot predict in advance how many games he will be likely to miss. The ramifications of these types of uncertainty are manifold, but perhaps the principle consequence is that they will be out of the 'action'. Furthermore, when footballers become injured in the course of playing, their daily activities alter and are associated with the generation of a mixture of emotions and feelings, common among which are anxiety, frustration, guilt, anger, embarrassment and depression (Roderick *et al*, 2000; Young *et al*, 1994). These feelings may arise to varying degrees in distinct social contexts, for example in different clubs, at different times in the season, and at different stages in the

player's career, yet all stem from adjustments in relations between players and managers, coaches, physiotherapists and other team members.

It is clear from the above quote and from the interviews conducted that players fear becoming injured. Their fears are explainable in part as the result of the generation of a number of uncertainties. Thus, incurring a *disabling* injury has a number of well-understood *meanings* for players. For example, an injury might mean that they will lose their place in the team, and they may not be certain of regaining their position once the injury has recovered. They may fear that if the injury is severe and requires a long period of treatment and rehabilitation, the manager will replace them permanently either by buying another player or promoting a less established player from the reserves. Moreover, players may not be certain that the injury has been correctly diagnosed by the club's physiotherapist or doctor, or possess a precise understanding of how long it will take to recover so they are once again fit for selection. They may also fear the reaction of the manager, and those of other players, to their status as an injured player (Roderick *et al*, 2000; Young *et al*, 1994). Players fear being stigmatised as malingerers, or, more bluntly, as soft or as poofters (see Chapter Five for a fuller discussion of this process). And finally, although this list is not exhaustive, there may even exist uncertainties in terms of assurances regarding future contracts at their present club and potential clubs in the future. Players become familiar with, and gain an understanding of, these fears and uncertainties in the course of their careers (especially their early careers), as they observe the constraints within which other, more established players are bound up, and they talk to others about the consequences which may result from particular incidents. Before long, however, as players commence their professional careers, they experience first hand the realities of being labelled 'injured', and it is these early insights and dealings with medical staff which provide the benchmarks for future encounters.

In the sociology of medicine literature, the concept of uncertainty has long been analysed as a central feature of day-to-day medical work, especially as it relates to the diagnosis and prognosis of a health problem (Adamson, 1997; Calnan, 1984; Davis, 1960; Fox, 1988; Roth, 1963). Being ill and requiring medical treatment impacts on the lives of people in a multiplicity of ways and generates numerous

types of uncertainties. Like professional footballers, many other people debate inwardly about what the effects of being ill will have for them in terms of, for example, their employment potential and the way in which others will treat them (Adamson, 1997; Conrad, 1987). These aspects of uncertainty are central in relation to professional football as well. Thus, the objects of this chapter are firstly to identify the myriad uncertainties experienced by players in the context of their occupation, and secondly to understand the ways in which they try to cope during these indeterminate periods of time.

The Sociology of Uncertainty

There are a number of categories of medical uncertainty found in the sociological literature (Conrad, 1987). In the first instance there exists the uncertainty of sensing that something unusual is going on. For example, a person may be suffering from soreness or a vague discomfort. In some cases, an attempt to deal with this uncertainty may lead one to seek out medical advice; however, it is well established that responses to pain vary according to cultural experiences. In order to understand how people come to consider themselves ill when they feel pain or discomfort, one must isolate some of the critical cultural *meanings* revolving round the perception of pain (Freidson, 1970). The second category of uncertainty is referred to as medical or clinical uncertainty. In short, this uncertainty derives from medical encounters where the doctors or other medical personnel are unsure 'what is going on'. They are unable to tell the patient what is causing the discomfort and therefore are unable to formulate a precise diagnosis. The third category of uncertainty is broad and stems from the diagnosis itself. Among other titles, it has come to be known as 'existential uncertainty' and is central to the patients experience of their medical problem. This term refers to a privately experienced awareness by patients that their future is open and undetermined. The unpredictable trajectories of many illnesses lead patients to ponder what it means to have a particular illness. Will they still be able to work? Will they need to change their lives? How will others treat them?

Unlike most members of the public (with some obvious exceptions including doctors, nurses, hospital staff, etc.), professional footballers come into contact

with medically trained staff each working-day at the football club, usually the physiotherapist. The club physiotherapist is a central member of the non-playing staff, who attends to the medical requirements of each player as and when necessary. If the physiotherapist is unable to make an accurate diagnosis, or if initial treatment proves insufficient, or if a player requires surgery, or specialist treatment, the physiotherapist may refer the player onto the club doctor and then a sports medicine specialist. Most injuries sustained by players are examined in the first instance by the club physiotherapist, for they take care of the primary health needs of players. Many of these injuries are non-serious (in that they cause only temporary discomfort) and occur during a match or training session. If the injury restricts mobility or is disabling, the affected area will receive medical attention almost immediately or, at least, come to the notice of the club physiotherapist. There is no sense of waiting to see what happens, i.e., whether the pain or discomfort might subside, as might be the case with most other people. For *all* people, however, believing oneself to be ill (or injured in the case of players) does not in itself lead to the use of available medical services.

Some injuries, such as that reported in the extract on Alan Mullery, are not visible upon inspection and the cause cannot be immediately identified. Injuries of this nature can vary in seriousness, and may be painful. It may be the case that a player is able to perform for a period of time with an injury of this type without a significant restriction either to speed or mobility and, despite experiencing discomfort, they may choose *to conceal* the injury from significant others. One player, for example, suggested that 'with experience, you can play a different type of game according to your limitations, if you are not 100% fit or you've got a sore groin then you are maybe not going to be doing the closing down, the work rate. You are going to be dropping off, looking for loose balls, that kind of thing, rather than going in to win balls. You play a different kind of game'. However, as the pain grows worse (as was the case with Alan Mullery) there comes a time when the player either cannot cope with the pain anymore, or the injury becomes too disabling for the player to continue effectively. Consequently, there remains no other course of action other than to inform the physiotherapist of the problem. One player interviewed stated that he had played matches and trained for about two months with a knee problem before informing the physiotherapist. Another player,

who had experienced problems with the left side of his groin, described why he continued to play as follows:

> **Player**: I started feeling my groin on the left-hand side, and I started feeling it about the October time and I kept on playing with it, and eventually round about Christmas, I went to see the physiotherapist.
>
> **MR**: So you played through the pain then?
>
> **Player**: Yes, I played through it for quite some time without telling anyone.
>
> **MR**: How did you mask the pain at that time?
>
> **Player**: It's a funny thing the hernia. You can get through games, but you don't really give it, umm, you can't give it your all, you can't stretch for certain balls, that sort of thing, but you can definitely get through it. First of all I didn't say anything, and then it got worse and worse and I gradually told people.
>
> **MR**: Why didn't you tell anyone straightaway?
>
> **Player**: Why, because I wanted to stay in the team.
>
> **MR**: It's a straightforward as that?
>
> **Player**: Yes.

This example was typical of the response of those players interviewed who developed a problem, such as a groin strain, which neither restricted mobility significantly in the initial stages, nor was observed first-hand. Many players spoke of their reluctance to seek medical advice in the first instance (that is, when sensing something was wrong), in part, because of what an injury could *mean*. These incidents provide model examples of the first type of uncertainty referred to in the sociology of medicine literature.

The second type of uncertainty, medical or clinical uncertainty, can arise when neither the player, physiotherapist nor sometimes the club doctor, are sure of what is going on (Calnan, 1984). Having sought the attention of the physiotherapist, players may suffer further anxieties about the injury and, centrally, whether, or how long, they will be *unfit for selection* to the team. The impact of this type of uncertainty can end, or be reduced, when the player is diagnosed as having a

particular injury. In this connection, one player interviewed spoke of the period between 'breaking down' and being diagnosed in the following way:

> The worse thing is, say you have an operation and you get back to fitness, and get back out playing and training and you have a break down. You get yourself into all that condition and then the initial time straight after, when you know things are wrong, that is the worse time. When, you know, from breaking down until sort of finding out why you've broken down, you are just in limbo, and that is the worse time. I have gone and had a real drink at this time, but as soon as I knew what was happening or whatever operation I needed, I could sort of focus myself again and get back at it. But it's the time when nobody knows what's going on, that's the worse thing.

In many cases in which physiotherapists are made aware of problems, i.e., discomfort or pain, players are expected to play on (during training or matches) to 'see how they get on'. In short, players are expected to test out their injury in the hope that in time, the pain will settle down, fade away and disappear. This type of expected or normative behaviour is a more common constraint for younger, less established players. However, unless they are too severely disabled, all players are constrained to keep on playing with pain and in discomfort – as an aspect of displaying an appropriate attitude. It is only when the pain develops and significantly restricts mobility, that a physiotherapist will remove players from training. It is clear from the interview data that the club physiotherapist and doctor, and the players themselves, are familiar with many injuries experienced in the course of playing, yet there are times when a diagnosis is not straightforward and a prolonged and uncertain period ensues.

A third type of uncertainty can arise out of the diagnosis itself. While there may be a certain amount of relief for players at finding out what the problem is, they may at this time experience a new set of uncertainties. In sociological literature, these are known as 'existential uncertainties' (Adamson, 1997) and they refer to the individual player's awareness that his future (at least in the short-term) is open and undetermined. Unlike clinical uncertainties which are experienced by medical

personnel as well as the player and significant others, existential uncertainties are experienced privately and are an aspect of the injury experience. For example, from the interviews conducted it is clear that players dwell on considerations concerning what the injury *means* in terms of their future playing career. How long will the injury take to recover and when will the player be fit for selection? Will the injury heal and the body be as fit and strong as before? Is the physiotherapist positive he has diagnosed the problem correctly? How will the manager and players treat the unfit player whilst he is recovering? Will the manager buy a replacement? Invariably these questions do not have simple or immediate answers for players and thus the uncertainties endure and are incorporated into, and become a central aspect of, the experience of being injured. Pat Nevin, the former Chelsea, Everton and Scottish international player, summarised this point as follows:

> So all the players have this fear that they'll be seen as malingering. The manager is giving out signals that he believes it, and if you've been bought by a club, particularly if it has been for a lot of money, you're worried that the fans are going to start thinking it too ... In other words, it's a hot bed of paranoias. But on top of all that, way on top of everything else, whatever injury you've got – and it doesn't matter whether it's something like a medial-ligament strain, which everyone knows takes four weeks to heal, or something more serious, which is less easy to attach a timescale to – you always end up wondering whether you'll *ever* be the same again.

What is most interesting about uncertainty sociologically speaking, in all the forms identified from the interviews, is how players manage it. The following discussion attempts to examine the ways in which players construct a variety of strategies to deal with the uncertainties of injury[1].

Coping with Injury

Footballers conceive of their injuries largely in terms of 'putting in time' (Roth, 1963) rather than in terms of the changes which occur physically. Thus, when discussing their injuries, players tend to point out how long they were out for and

how many matches they had missed by way of summarising what, medically speaking, might otherwise be understood as a complex sequence of physiological events. One player interviewed described a number of injuries as follows:

> The hernia, I was only out for three to four weeks. I had been having problems. It was last year when we had the FA Cup run, and I'd been having problems with my groin for most of the season and we decided after the quarter final game to get it done, to see if we could get back in time for the semi-final game. I got back in time, roughly 3½ weeks. I was out for 5 or 6 games. My knee, I did that this season, my right knee that is, and I missed 8 or so games. My nose and my other knee I did when I was playing in the reserves so we didn't have to consider any first team games. My knee took about ten weeks at that time. And then my nose, I played the week after.

Another player described the emphasis which is placed on time and in most cases the general urgency to return to the playing squad as quickly as possible. This urgency is not only expressed by individual players, but by all people who are connected with the 'health' of team members. In the following example, the player refers to the necessity to take advice from an appropriate surgeon and the differences such consultations can make:

> I think it does [make a difference] if you can get to see the right specialist, I mean some of the specialists who are around are not particularly sports orientated. They are specialists in that they treat Mr Joe Bloggs who goes in, who's broken his ankle or leg. They are not particularly geared to dealing with sports people who really have got to get in, get it done and get back as quickly as possible.

The point being made is that specialists who are not familiar with the time-related constraints of professional sport cultures are perceived as not being able to meet the particular needs of footballers. The above player continues asserting that:

[some specialists] are on a different timetable and, their knowledge is not quite as much at the cutting edge as it could be. I mean, there's a guy who comes away with the Welsh squad based in Cardiff who's set up a sports injury clinic and he's completely aimed at sports people. That's proved really successful for him and he's got a lot of respect. A lot of top players go to him and have treatment because they know he's right at the cutting edge of what can be achieved. I mean if you get the wrong specialist it can take twice as long as it would with the right specialist, in terms of getting back. I mean, we've had problems with people at the club where specialists have stapled hernias and things like that and the staples have come undone, or where they just don't seem to have the appreciation of this is a sports person who's not going to be able to muddle through for a year and wait for it to heal properly. If they make a mess of it then the chances are that he's going to be coming back in to have it done again.

The central point is that medical specialists who deal with professional footballers require a heightened awareness of timing in order to gain players' confidence. This way of thinking is not born out of ignorance, but is a consequence of the culturally-bound social situation in which players are tied. In the course of this discussion there will be an emphasis on the way in which players develop coping strategies in terms of conceptions of time. Thus, the first concern of all injured players when examined by club physiotherapists is not to find out, for example, a precise diagnosis or what treatment is required, but to gain an indication of how long the injury will take to recover, and when they will be fit for selection to the team. In terms of many soft tissue injuries, players, physiotherapists and managers have a clear understanding of how long the player will take to recover. One player, for example, remarked that, 'if you pick up a dead leg or a sprained ankle you know it's going to be a couple of weeks, but you know you'll be back, you can sort of see the finishing line and you know what type of work you've got to do'. Another player affirmed this point in the following way. He said:

> **Player**: You think 'cartilage', five or six weeks maximum you'd be playing, you know, so I was actually aiming to get back in five or six weeks.

> **MR:** Why did you have five or six weeks in mind?
>
> **Player:** Well, because that's the general, if you have a cartilage it's, well, five or six weeks at the maximum.
>
> **MR:** Where did you learn this?
>
> **Player:** Well, just from other players, and he [the club doctor] sort of said that as well.

These specific understandings of time-periods are gained through experience and by discussions with older players or players who have experienced similar injuries. One finds that for many common injuries, for example, dead-legs, strained muscles and sprained joints, players have a clear understanding of how long it should be before they are ready to play again. One player suggested that 'it's just experience, that's just a matter of knowing your own body, right, because you just naturally pick up those injuries through the career. You've had them before and you know how serious it is, and how long it'll take'. Discussions among injured and fit players and physiotherapists regularly revolve round issues concerning how long they will be 'out'; how long it will be before they can play again; how long it will be before they can jog or kick or start training with the squad, etc. This discourse leads players to become increasingly familiar with particular types of recurring injuries, and one might even propose that some older players may see themselves, or may be viewed by others, as 'mini-experts' (Waddington and Walker, 1991). Their expertise, however, is connected in a narrow sense to a developed awareness of time, rather than an understanding of, firstly, the way in which one's body repairs any damage or, secondly, appropriate medical practices.

As a consequence, players are able to construct particular understandings of certain injuries. As they become increasingly familiar with particular injuries, they are able to generate *timetables* concerning when particular events *should* occur, for example, when they will start to jog, sprint, begin ball-work and tackling, etc. In other words, players, in an effort to define when certain things should happen to them, develop time-related benchmarks which mark the passage to fitness. These benchmarks serve to focus the minds of injured players and make them aware of whether they are ahead of, or behind, the socially constructed timetable. In other

words, players develop timetables in part as a method of gauging their own progress. Thus, thinking in terms of time-related benchmarks assists the player's capability of predicting and controlling their immediate futures and leads, therefore, to a reduction of uncertainty.

To summarise this general point thus far, one way in which all players tend to cope with the uncertainties generated when injured, is to structure the time period through which uncertain events occur. This general principal applies to many aspects of the experience of injury for players. Even when the physiotherapist cannot be precise in terms of forecasting significant future dates, players, usually in combination with physiotherapists, will attempt to structure the immediate passage of time by generating short-term time-related goals. More serious or complex injuries, therefore, are also understood in terms of blocks of time. As a consequence, the period of time spent receiving treatment and then rehabilitating from injury may become psychologically more manageable.

The Timing of Surgery

Within professional football clubs, encounters between players and club physiotherapists tend to be quite prolonged and highly personalised, by comparison with most doctor-patient relationships. For the most part injured players are in contact with the club physiotherapist(s) daily and their progress is assessed and monitored and is a source of constant discussion. It is during these focused encounters (Goffman, 1961) that players and physiotherapists negotiate and workout the details of treatment and rehabilitation timetables. However, as treatment progresses, both players and physiotherapists are better able to assess the speed of recovery and thus to re-interpret timetable benchmarks. The ability of players to negotiate with physiotherapists about their treatment and to step up the intensity of their rehabilitation is one of the more striking and distinctive features of this 'doctor-patient' relationship. Taken as a whole, one might describe the injury 'career' as a bargaining process (Roth, 1963) in which players, especially first-team members, have a significant involvement in decision-making processes. In most 'normal' medical relationships, although there may be much discussion of symptoms, diagnosis and prognosis, decisions concerning treatment are usually

made by the doctor and accepted unquestioningly by patients, particularly those patients admitted to hospital. While the ability of patients to negotiate with doctors should not be understated, many sociological examinations of medical relationships – between doctors and patients – describe them as asymmetrical. There exists a different balance of power among the social relations within football clubs. It is not unusual for players to discuss future pathways with medical staff, or to be left with a choice of options in terms of the way their injury will be treated, some of which may involve a level of personal risk. This pattern of negotiation is conspicuously evident during discussions concerning the timing of surgery.

Unless it is an emergency, people treated by NHS doctors who require surgery must wait in line for their operations. Dates are dictated by-and-large by hospital administrators and surgeons. For people treated privately, their treatment can be accelerated by virtue of their paying for immediate attention. In terms of the timing of surgery, it is nearly always the case that the desire of most people is to have their operations as soon as possible, the general orientation to surgery being the sooner the clinical problem is attended to, the better. This is not necessarily the case in professional football. Compared with what might be termed 'normal' timetabling of surgery, the scheduling of operations for football players might be said to be relatively distinct. This distinctiveness is rooted in the fact that the people involved in organising and deciding on the timing of surgery have different 'interests' tied in with this decision-making process. In the first instance their interests may not necessarily be related to the immediate solution of the clinical problem or the long-term health of players. It is common practice for players and medical staff to have in mind a particular date to work towards which corresponds to an important match or, preferably, the close season. So, an operation might be postponed until the end of the season in order that the player can continue playing – carrying the injury – or he may request immediate surgery in order to be fit for a particular forthcoming match. In this way, players in part attempt to manage the uncertainties associated with injury. Some examples may help to illustrate this point.

One experienced player stated that he had had no fewer than sixteen operations in his playing career and that, as is common in professional football, he had continued playing with most of these injuries and had postponed the surgery – to his knees, groin and shoulder – in each case until the close season. He explains: 'the injuries I was carrying weren't really interfering totally with my game ... so with my shoulder injury it was more painful at nights. Trying to sleep at night it had been very painful but I was getting through games with it'. The player said that the decision to *get through games* in this manner was left to him and that he was happy to continue; there was, he said, always an incentive to keep playing as the club was usually competing for a place in European competition for the following season, or was doing well in cup competitions. For each of these injuries then the player, in conjunction with club medical staff, was able to put off the surgery and, if only in the short-term, alleviate any uncertainties which may have been generated.

It is clear that players are normally keen to play – and are eager *to be seen* to be keen to play – whenever possible, yet players, in particular younger and less established players, may also be subject to a variety of pressures from managers to continue playing through injury. Without overstating the pressure exerted by managers on players and club medical staff – and it is clear that situations differ from club to club – managing the timing of surgery may also be one strategy for ensuring a greater number of 'fit' players are available for selection. One player suggested that managers are keen for, and put pressure on, players to agree to delay necessary surgery. He said:

> I think you'd find this situation in any club. The physiotherapist will go to the manager and say these are the symptoms, this is what should be done, what's the solution? And then the managers will come up with their own idea of what the players should be able to get through, that game, this game, and then at the and of the season they should have the operation. The favourite thing for a manager is for players to get to the end of the season and then do the operation in the summer break. That's all that managers ideally want to happen.

An altogether more career threatening situation was described by one player who had developed a back problem whilst playing as an apprentice which at first he put down to growing pains. He suggested that he could play through the discomfort although as time went on the pains gradually became worse. He said that he started getting groin strains and hamstring strains as a consequence and that by the time he met with the consultant, the problem, which had been troubling him for well over one season, had progressed down his leg significantly. The consultant diagnosed a stress fracture in the player's back and informed him that following the operation he would be out for at least a year. At this stage the player was only nineteen years old and after being released from his first club, he had been taken on by a club in the third division. The player suggested that he was keen to play until the end of the season – as is common in professional football – and then to have the surgery in the summer break. With seven months of the season left the consultant said that in his opinion he was gambling with his career, suggesting moreover that if he continued playing, 'by 23, you might be finished'. The player rationalised his decision to continue playing until the end of that season in the following way:

> I spoke to my father you know, it was touch and go whether I was going to have it done or not ... I didn't want to do anything else. I was playing in the first team at the time, and I thought, you know, well we'll see how the season goes anyway, because if I'd had a crap season ... I'd say well, wish me all of the best, you know, that type of thing. But I was so determined that I wanted to be a footballer, and I'd had the knock back of being released by [my first club], which was a big blow at the time, and I didn't want to give up trying. I couldn't have gone anywhere anyway so I thought the only way is up. So I played the rest of the season.

In the first instance, players, unless physically disabled, attempt to continue playing in the hope that any pain eventually disappears. Players attempt to manage the discomfort either by taking pain-killing tablets or by simply *gritting their teeth* and playing through the pain-barrier. If the pain does not subside then players seek the attention of the club physiotherapist (and sometimes the club doctor). Yet, even club physiotherapists and doctors think – in the majority of cases – in terms

of managing the pain and discomfort from week to week rather than allowing time for the injury to heal and recover. If surgery is required, as might be the case with many groin or knee injuries common to footballers, it is very typical for physiotherapists and players to think in terms of postponing operations until the close season. In fact, it would appear that this is the preferred course of action for many players which assists them to manage the uncertainties which arise when injuries are sustained.

Alternatively, players and medical staff may decide that in particular circumstances – perhaps with an important cup match impending, or maybe with the prospect of a relegation battle to come, or even sometimes in the early stages of a season – it is more appropriate either to undergo surgery immediately or for it to be timed for a particular break between important games. For example, one player, who had been taking anti-inflammatories and 'resting' rather than training in order to get through games for most of this season, described the reason he decided to press for an operation to his groin:

> Well, because we were having this FA cup run, I thought to myself, you know, if I don't get something done about it [the groin] soon, it might get to the point where I might not be able to play in the bigger games later on in the Cup run, so I made the decision to go and get it done at that particular time [after the quarter-final] so it would allow me to get back for the semi-final game.

Describing a similar set of circumstances, another experienced player suggested that having a target date to aim for helped to focus his mind and gave him a goal to work towards. He said:

> I went over on my knee, and I thought I'd completely wrecked it and I was carried off and thought that was the end of that. I thought I wouldn't play again that year for sure, and when they diagnosed everything they said that I'd been lucky ... I went in [to hospital] on the Monday, Tuesday for an op, and I was back playing within two and half weeks so it was quite pleasing really to play in the Cup Final. I think the Cup Final had a bearing on it as

well because that gave me more of a compulsive attitude to want to be fit for that. Whether or not I would have been the same if we were just playing out until the end of the season, probably not.

The two examples above typify the central point being made, namely that whether surgery is delayed until the end of the season or is timed in accordance with significant forthcoming cup or league matches, the uppermost consideration of players, managers and medical staff concerns availability to play, i.e., whether the player is 'fit' for selection, rather than the healing of the clinical problem and the player's long-term health. It seems almost too obvious to point out that the timing of surgery in this fashion enables players to play – therefore reinforcing their sense of self and feelings of being wanted – yet, as has been pointed out earlier, they are often in favour of these options as a way of off-setting, at least in the short-term, the uncertainties associated with the injury they are carrying.

The general assumption noted at the beginning of this section is that relations between doctors and patients in NHS hospitals and general practice are 'asymmetrical'. Few patients ever have enough confidence in their medical knowledge to question the authority of decisions made by doctors. Whilst there may be some similarities between the pressures footballers are able to exert on club doctors in terms of bargaining over the nature of treatment by comparison with the bargaining powers of 'ordinary' patients, players appear on the face of things to have much greater latitude in relation to negotiating clinical decisions and treatment timetables. The process of negotiation and the decisions arrived at can only be understood against a backcloth of cultural expectations and assumptions with regard to the behaviour of players, managers and club medical staff. One might go as far as to say that the patterns of behaviour identified in the course of this research may be more adequately understood if one thinks in terms of a *culturally-bound time clock* which comes to be internalised by players and leads them in specific contexts to behave in 'appropriate' ways. These strategies – the construction of treatment and rehabilitation timetables and the timing of surgery – might be considered among the principal means by which players cope with the uncertainties associated with injury.

Second Opinions

The discussion thus far, which has focused on the uncertainties connected with injury and the way in which players cope with and manage these uncertainties, has been underpinned by conceptions of *time*. For instance, injured players are concerned – and must be seen to be doing everything possible – to get back to 'fitness' in the shortest feasible time; and a central characteristic of the culture of football, as it relates to medical practice, concerns a strong and ever present constraint for club physiotherapists and doctors to 'get players fit yesterday' (Waddington *et al*, 1999). All people involved in the management of injury in professional football – including players, club physiotherapists, club doctors, managers, and so forth – are acutely aware of this constraint. Yet, from the interviews conducted it is clear that from time to time players lose trust in their club physiotherapists. Furthermore it is clear that some club physiotherapists are stigmatised by players in terms of their competence, while others gain reputations in relation to diagnosing particular types of injuries – usually more complex injuries – observing relevant symptoms, and treating clinical problems in a medically effective manner. A clear example of this was described by one player whose knee injury had 'broken-down' a number of times. He said:

> I got to the stage where the physio was looking at me, he didn't know really what to do and I was fed up being round the ground. People were looking at me as if to say 'oh he's broke down again' and so I just went away. I went back to the old physio I used to know at [my previous club] who was top class and I stayed away from the club for about 6 or 7 weeks and I just solely worked with him. The physio at this club doesn't know that, I spoke to the manager about it ... and he sort of like said, 'Okay, I know the score with the physio here, go and get yourself sorted out', and he generally sort of fobbed the physio off.

It has been pointed out already that relations between players and club physiotherapists can be highly personalised. Players whether injured or fit have contact with their club physiotherapists almost everyday. Over time

physiotherapists become familiar with most players at the club and conversely, players get to know the mannerisms and working practices of their physiotherapists. Like many other occupational settings where employees work closely with one another, there are pressures, especially on players, to be seen to be 'good patients' when injured; in other words, to co-operate with the demands and expectations of the physiotherapist in deed if not in thought. While some players have complete confidence in their club physiotherapist (and as a matter of interest these physiotherapists have tended to be those qualified to chartered standards), others have suggested, some quite emphatically, that they do not trust their club physiotherapist to provide adequate medical support. Where this is the case, and players are *uncertain* whether they will receive accurate diagnoses and rehabilitation programmes, they have tended to seek *second opinions*. In order not to undermine the authority of their club physiotherapist, or to be seen as 'bad patients', players tend to seek the advice of others without informing their club physiotherapist of their intention to do so.

When asked about whether they would seek a second opinion, many players suggested that it is not a course of action with which they felt comfortable. Most players said they felt guilty about going behind the 'back of the club' and that they felt they were, in some sense or other, letting their club physiotherapist down. That said, however, every player interviewed had either sought a second opinion, or knew other players who had. Seeking second opinions and receiving treatment outside the club is a very common pattern of behaviour in professional football. One player described the following circumstances by way of explaining his decision to seek a second opinion:

> When I moved up to [a Second Division club] they had big problems. They had a guy who had really done no more than a first aid course, and so in terms of diagnosing what was actually wrong with people it was a massive problem. So many times the diagnosis was wrong and they would then be having a certain type of treatment or were told to rest, when clearly it was an operation that was needed to actually solve the problem. That became a difficult situation.

Another player, who knew colleagues who sought the assistance of other physiotherapists, suggested that at the beginning of his career a second opinion was not something that he would have considered. Now, with more than six years experience, he would seek a second opinion if he didn't 'have the confidence of the person who was in charge'; for him then, it was a matter of trust. However, this point was stressed most vividly by one experienced player who often sought outside assistance. When asked generally about meeting and getting to know physiotherapists at new clubs, he responded in the following way:

> You've got like your old school physios and you've got your physios that are up-together and who know what the score is and ... it's just basically trying to sus the person out. I mean, I've been lucky really because I've been to a good physio in my career and I know what's right and what's wrong in a way. I take him as a benchmark and it's a case of ... I often come here and then go back to the physio at [my previous club] and see him. He's okay, he takes me on, and he'll have a look at me, and I take more notice of what he says to me. If I've been here all morning and I go to the physio at [my previous club] at say 4 o'clock and the next day, if he tells me to do something, whether this physio here at [my present club] tells me otherwise, I do what that physio says at [my previous club] because I think half the battle is, if you trust the physio and he puts a bit of faith in your mind, you're half way there. You've got to believe in him. If you don't believe in him, there's no point in doing it.

It was established from the interview data that players sought medical assistance from a variety of people whom they perceived as trustworthy and competent. The most common person among those to whom players turned – as the previous quote indicates – were physiotherapists from previous clubs. A Third Division player described a common pattern of behaviour. When asked whether he knew of players who had sought second opinions without the consent of club physiotherapists, he replied that: 'In the past they have. In the past quite a few have. Especially like, a lot of players, who don't live near the club, but who live where they've been at clubs before, and they know the physio at that club, they would tend to go back to the physio that they know'. Not all players retain

contacts with previous physiotherapists in this manner. Chartered physiotherapists who worked in private practices had treated a small number of players. Other contacts with chartered physiotherapists were of a more 'accidental' nature. For example, one player, who was undertaking a part-time degree course, had attended a number of guest lectures given by a chartered physiotherapist – with whom he retained contact – who worked full-time in another sport. Another player said that when dropping off and picking up his child from school, he had become friendly with a mother who worked as a physiotherapist in a local NHS hospital. He said he often described to her his injuries – including the diagnosis of the club physiotherapist, who was not qualified to a chartered level – and the treatment he was receiving, and they would then discuss both the diagnosis and the rehabilitation programme. It was not, he claimed, that he did not trust the club physiotherapist, he wanted merely to ensure that he was not 'wasting time'.

There are enough examples described in the interviews to conclude that seeking second opinions is a common pattern of behaviour among professional footballers. Moreover, players seek both advice and treatment and *conceal* this fact from their club physiotherapists. In the view of the players the underlying reason for this type of deception is straightforward. In the words of one player, when asked about why players sought second opinions without informing club physiotherapists he responded by suggesting that players, 'don't want to upset anyone'. Seeking medical advice outside the club is often viewed within the club as implying criticism of the club's facilities and medical personnel. Further to this, players do not want to be considered by physiotherapists, but especially managers, as *troublemakers*; that is, people who are not willing either to listen, to take advice or to co-operate. Players like to be thought of as *good pro's* who display 'good attitudes' to their work. A central aspect of a 'good attitude' in professional football, especially for young and inexperienced players, is to appear to be respectful and to be prepared to listen. Young players learn that such attitudes extend not only to senior players and the management team but also to club medical staff. As a consequence, many players referred to situations in which, as inexperienced players, they had accepted unquestioningly the advice of physiotherapists and doctors – although many probably did not realise that alternatives existed – and had come to consider this way of behaving as

appropriate, respectful and in their best interests. The balance of power among players, managers and club medical staff cannot be understood in economic terms alone, for explanations of why players come to conceal certain information from their club physiotherapists involve understanding an *emotional* dimension of this network of power relationships. In short, players feel a degree of guilt about not trusting their club physiotherapists. Yet, it is clear that any number of emotions generated are off set by the need for players to take the initiative – to take control for themselves – and to address any personal uncertainties they may be feeling.

In many of the interviews, players spoke in terms of 'faith' and 'trust' in accounts of medical relationships. It is proposed, however, that these terms have slightly different meanings in professional football from those expressed by patients treated in NHS hospitals and by general practitioners. In the sociological literature concerned with issues of trust in medical encounters, 'good' doctors are perceived as having adept interpersonal skills. They are excellent communicators who 'talk things over' and have an 'ability to listen' (Lupton, 1996). From the interviews with professional footballers it is clear that while these skills are not dismissed as irrelevant, they do not appear to be central concerns. Players perceive 'good' physiotherapists and doctors to be those who are concerned with getting them back to 'fitness' as quickly as possible, i.e., who understand the time constraints, and who minimise injury breakdown. If players lose trust in their club physiotherapists, as seems to be the case from time to time, they may seek to take control of the uncertainties generated by engaging in what is known, in sociological literature, as 'consumerist behaviour' (Lupton, 1996); for example, reading up about their injury, or consulting with different physiotherapists and doctors. Yet players do not seek out doctors in a manner similar to that of other consumers who exercise choice over, for example, hairdressers or restaurants, instead they are constrained to move back and forth between their present club physiotherapists and other medical personnel whose skills they have sought. This behaviour is more adequately understood when one takes account of emotional bonds – in so far as young players learn that club physiotherapists work in their 'best' interests and that they should invest their trust in them – as well as economic and political bonds, which constrains their ability to choose their practitioners for themselves.

Conclusion

There are a great number of uncertainties which are experienced by players when they sustain injuries. These uncertainties vary from one situation to the next and may be related to factors such as the severity, complexity and visibility of the injury, the age and status of players, the stage in the season and the importance of forthcoming matches, the orientation of managers towards injured players (Waddington *et al*, 1999), and the perceived competence of the physiotherapist. Some of these aspects have been discussed in this chapter. Yet there are clear patterns discernible in the behaviour of players in terms of the ways in which they cope with and manage these uncertainties. These coping strategies – including the construction of treatment timetables, the timing of surgery and seeking second opinions – are considered most interesting sociologically as they highlight firstly the way players manage the power relationships in which they are bound up, and secondly they indicate the importance of understanding the emotions which arise out of the injury experience. Of importance also is the way in which conceptions of *time* tend to pre-dominate in the minds not only of players and managers, but also of often highly qualified medical personnel. The time-related orientations of these people towards injuries leads them on many occasions to prioritise the short-term goal of getting players fit for selection for the first team, in spite of the consequences that this course of action may have for players' long-term health.

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[1] The question of how players manage and deal with their injuries has been addressed by a number of sociologists. Nixon (1992; 1993), for example, employs a 'social network analysis' approach to examine the contexts that entrap elite athletes and constrain the range of alternative courses of action that they perceive are available to them. Applying a pro-feminist approach, Messner (1992), Sabo & Panepinto (1990), and Young *et al* (1994) examine the risks of playing with pain and injury in terms of the way in which it leads to the validation of masculine and athletic identities. All of these studies, however, focus on the manner in which athletes normalise (Albert, 1999; Curry, 1993), rationalise, and legitimise their behaviour. They seek, that is, to understand the strategies developed by athletes in their attempts, in both the short and long-term (Young *et al*, 1994), to 'restore' what constitute, for them, compromised and diminishing notions of self.

Chapter Five

Injuries, Stigma and Social Identity[1]

From time to time players gain reputations among supporters, journalists – and other 'outsiders' – as being injury prone. England international and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder, Darren Anderton, for example, became known widely as 'sick note' because of a string of injuries which have interrupted his playing career and which have led him to play fewer than one-hundred times in five seasons. Whilst this label may appear from the 'outside' as little more than a harmless joke, stigmas such as this have a number of unintended consequences for players. The networks of relationships in which players are bound-up at their workplace involve not only associations with supporters, but what, for them, are more central interdependencies; that is, relationships with managers, coaches, club physiotherapists, and their fellow team-mates. It is these people who determine for the most part the extent to which players may be stigmatized, or the perceived magnitude of discrediting events. For players, therefore, stigma results from being identified as flawed, discredited or spoiled (Goffman, 1963). The former Scotland International, Pat Nevin, has explained how injured players are made to feel as though they are, firstly, faking the full extent of their injury, and secondly, betraying their team-mates:

> It's one of those things about 'the English Game' or certainly the British one, indeed the British psyche, that players *almost always* come back too early. There is certainly a pressure from the clubs and a pressure from the management for them to do so. Liverpool under Shankly was an excellent example of this. Shankly apparently wouldn't talk to you if you were injured – he'd take your injury as a personal affront! It's true, it was no joke. You'd be going through all these personal traumas and fears, and your manager or coach is just making it worse by making you feel like a 'shammer'. The physios might think a little, at the backs of their minds, about what you must be going through, but other people at the club, managers especially, seemed to be simply offended by your being injured.

This has an effect on the player. Whether the feeling is the player's own paranoia or if it comes from the manager in a more calculated way, I don't know – it could be both – but you're made to feel a little bit of a cheat (Nevin and Sik, 1998, p. 88, italics in original).

It is clear that a number of fears are generated when players become injured. As has been stated in Chapter Four on injury and uncertainty, the fears of players are complex and explanations of their vulnerabilities are contingent on a number of factors. Among them is a fear that they will be stigmatized as malingerers, or as a bit *soft*, or – to use Nevin's term – as 'cheats'. This fear is the principal focus of this chapter. Thus, the objects of this section of this chapter are to examine the ways in which professional footballers become, or perceive themselves as being, discredited and stigmatized by managers, physiotherapists or even other players, and to understand how they – as players – contribute to processes of discrediting (Goffman, 1963).

One former player said of one of his managers, for example: 'He was a wild man. I think he put players under pressure ... If you didn't want to play because you had an injury then you were soft. You were soft if you didn't want to play. I suppose it could have been a form of emotional blackmail. He was a bit like that'. For other players, their fears are connected with the notion that they are letting down team-mates, managers, coaches, supporters, as well as their family. For example, one player, who during his second game for his new club received a serious knee injury which prevented him from playing for almost a year, clearly felt that, in some ill-defined but very real sense, he had let his new club down; in describing his injury and subsequent lengthy rehabilitation, he continually emphasised – as if to excuse his inability to make any playing contribution to the club – that the injury 'wasn't my fault'. As well as wanting to be seen to be working hard to recover from his long-term injury, and in order to compensate for his lack of contribution to the club in terms of 'playing matches', this player undertook the responsibility of representing the club at official functions as often as possible. He 'felt bad' towards the club who had bought him and to the supporters who, he claims, have expectations of new arrivals. He wanted to be seen to be doing something by way of *contributing* to his new club.

Players do not want to be viewed by significant others – particularly by managers – as though, for one reason or other, they are stretching the truth in relation to an injury and they do not want to be thought of as letting down their team mates. As a consequence players take action to avoid accusations of this nature; accusations which are an aspect of the process of stigmatization. In terms of injury experiences, this action consists primarily of playing through pain and injury, sometimes against their better judgement, as a way of displaying a characteristic which, among members of professional football clubs, is regarded as a 'good' professional attitude. Thus, playing through pain and ignoring injury is normalised and any behaviour which deviates from *the normal* is apt to offend, in Durkheim's (2001) terms, the 'collective sentiments' of other members of the football club. Moreover, the collective sentiments held by players, managers and physiotherapists, in relation to injury are reinforced by their highlighting and discrediting of behaviour which, in their terms, is considered deviant. In addition, the daily schedule and routine for injured players in many clubs is often designed to be more demanding than 'normal' training (i.e., training for 'fit' players) in terms of physical effort and time, in order to act as a disincentive for players to remain injured longer than necessary or for those who simply want *to step out of the firing line*. A short examination of the way in which the daily routine of players leads them firstly to recognise their status, albeit a temporary one, as 'non-producers' (Waddington *et al*, 1999), and secondly to experience a loss of self, is undertaken in this chapter.

Swinging the lead

Without observable evidence, for example a broken bone, dislocation or concussion, which indicates a player may be in pain, a club physiotherapist or manager can only know of a player's discomfort via communication with the player. Kotarba (1983: 133) suggests that pain-afflicted people appear quite normal in the absence of an observable disability or illness, and remarks that 'secrecy is an essential property of the chronic pain experience'. Moreover, Kotarba (1983) suggests that a pain-afflicted person may be discredited if the 'critical audience' at hand (and in the case of professional football that audience

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may comprise the manager, coach, club physiotherapist and doctor, and other players) has reason to believe that the speaker is falsely claiming pain in order to be relieved of unbearable role expectations. Many of the players who were interviewed referred to incidents where they were simply disbelieved and spoke of circumstances in which other players had 'spun a yarn' or were otherwise accused of 'swinging the lead' in order to excuse themselves from among other things, lost matches and hard endurance training. One former player recounted an incident at one of his clubs in which a high profile international player who was involved in a proposed transfer to the club had been complaining of pain and had failed a pre-transfer fitness test:

> Do you remember [the player], he came down to [our club] because we were going to sign him. He had been having trouble with a thigh injury and [his club] were forcing him to train. I think this was true because nobody thought he had got this condition. They didn't believe him and so he was having to train. When he came down to us he had an X-ray and they found the injury and we said we couldn't sign him. I can't remember exactly what was wrong with him but it 'made him' because his club then believed that he was telling the truth. They let him off training and he started running around like a two year old.

Ideally players want their injuries and reports of discomfort and pain to be believed and viewed by significant others as genuine. They do not want to be considered as complainers, as 'soft' or as though they are not 'up for it', and nearly all players, but particularly younger, less experienced players, are constrained to 'manage the information' (Goffman, 1963) they offer about themselves in order to avoid becoming discredited. One example, in which a player complained regularly of pain but was disbelieved, involved the young, inexperienced player on contract with Sunderland Football Club, Keiron Brady – referred to previously in Chapter Three. In this respect the point of relevance concerns the statement made by the youth team coach, Malcolm Crosby, at Sunderland who, on viewing the youth player limping during a six-mile run, claimed that he did not believe there was something wrong with his leg. In his witness statement Brady makes the following remarks: 'He [Malcolm Crosby]

told me he wasn't going to put up with any more nonsense. He told me that I couldn't stop and to keep going. He then sent the other players off in a different direction and he ran with me along the coast lecturing me about my attitude and telling me I just didn't like hard work'. The youth team manager, Malcolm Crosby, felt that the player had an *attitude* problem.

It is clear from the interviews and other available evidence that players, club managers and even physiotherapists, make judgements, as well as medical diagnoses, on other players in relation to injury problems and complaints. These judgements may take a *moral* form when the player in question is considered by others to be injury prone, or to have an attitude problem – generally speaking discredited – in relation to stamina training, long journeys to away matches or important cup and league matches. However, these moral judgements are also made in relation to socially constructed *rules* concerning appropriate conduct associated with particular injuries; for example, one rule might be that players are expected to carry and play through 'minor' soft tissue injuries such as pulls and strains. Not playing through an injury of this type, and therefore breaking this sub-cultural 'rule', can lead to the player becoming stigmatized (Goffman, 1963). Moreover moral evaluations are often guided by an interpretation of the player's behaviour based on pre-existing knowledge or even prejudice about him, as seems to be the case with the young Sunderland player, Brady. Thus, the moral evaluation of Brady has to do with an *a priori* interpretation of his past conduct which can render ineffective – as far as his manager and team mates are concerned – any legitimate medical diagnoses of symptoms by club physiotherapists or doctors. Similar cases in which employees have taken their employers to court in relation to, for instance, repetitive strain injuries, have been referred to as 'pilgrimages of pain' (Reid *et al*, 1991). Also, in this connection, Dodier (1985) examines the social uses of illness at the workplace.

The issue for many players, however, is not always that of managing interaction in which they have already been discredited – although this is clearly an issue for some – but rather to manage and control information in a way such that they avoid *becoming* discredited. In short all players might be thought of as 'discreditable' (Goffman, 1963). When experiencing pain or discomfort, players are faced with a

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dilemma which, to greater or lesser degrees, is encapsulated in a quote from Goffman's classic study of stigmas: 'To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where' (1963, p.42). So for discreditable players – that is, those who sustain a number of injuries in succession or who experience continual bouts of pain – the problem is not that they must face prejudice against them, but that they must control information among managers and team mates who are prejudiced against players of the kind they can be revealed to be.

All players interviewed said they knew of 'cheats' and malingerers at both current and past clubs, yet predictably none recognised this behaviour in themselves. One Premiership club doctor – whose remarks will be employed to summarise the discussion thus far – suggested, in a manner similar to players, that a player under his care who gained a reputation for being injury-prone among club staff consequently became the target of backhanded criticism. He said that the team-mates of this player 'take the mickey out of him and they get irritated by him and they will start calling him a lazy bastard or whatever'. In fact this club doctor had few complimentary comments to make about this player – who he said was not typical of the majority of players under his care – as the following quote demonstrates: 'He was a nightmare, but he was always being injured and off with one thing or another. We spent a lot of time and a lot of money trying to get him fit and we never could ... That sort of player was a hypochondriac'. He continued by raising questions concerning, among other things, the player's mental state:

> We have had players like that which, you know, the slightest knock, the slightest pain, they start complaining and saying they can't play. 'I can't play, there's too much pain', or 'it hurts me, I'll do more injury to myself'. You do get that. I can't abide it and find it difficult to understand personally. I think if you've been selected to play at that level [Premiership] then you want to play, you'd be positive, but in fact some of them, it comes from their background I suppose, their upbringing if you want to use those terms ... He was a case in point ... I told two managers, 'this guy is never going to be any good for this club', and even the consultants couldn't find anything wrong with him. He was scoped,

examined, MIR scanned, he was everything and we just couldn't find anything wrong with him ... We never actually referred him for psychological help but you sometimes wonder.

Unlike the young Sunderland Football Club player, Keiron Brady, referred to earlier, the club medical staff in this case could not provide evidence to indicate that this player *wasn't* a hypochondriac. Thus, the identity of this player is spoiled.

Player Banter

Among the behaviour most commonly described by players in relation to the management of injuries is the banter and humour directed at injured players, particularly those players who seem to be injured most frequently. All the players interviewed recalled situations where they had joked at the expense of an injured player, or were themselves on the receiving end of jokes concerning their injuries. Joking of this nature – what players considered part-and-parcel of everyday banter – varies in terms of the time of season or the perceived importance of forthcoming matches, or the degree of severity of injury, and so forth. A division three player who had a long-term knee problem, for example, said when describing his present situation:

> It's quite amusing when players, like, you get the 'Man Friday' shout, which is my usual shout. I just train on Friday. You get, well one player suddenly got about five different injuries in the space of about five weeks, you know, he got the mickey taken, you know for picking-up an injury and for being a 'sick note' and things like this.

One former player suggested, in a less humorous tone, that 'some players were the butt of jokes because of injuries (from other players) most definitely. Players do not like other players who are constantly injured, they don't like that. They get irritated with them'. A current player in his early twenties said that when he was injured, other players would jokingly insinuate that he was feigning injury to have a rest. They would say, 'come on, you're having a laugh aren't you. It's Monday morning, it's pissing down with rain, and you've got a sore hamstring'. He went

on to say that certain players at his club 'get slaughtered' during verbal exchanges such as this especially if they sustain a number of injuries in succession. This type of banter among players is commonplace and appears in many cases to be double-edged. It seems important to understand that despite being couched in humorous and seemingly harmless terms, each joke contains a more serious implicit but generally understood meaning (Collinson, 1988 and 1992). These jokes may be alternatively recognised as veiled insults which are mediated through ambiguous 'piss-takes' and which imply that the injured player is either lazy, soft, or in Pat Nevin's term 'a shammer'. One experienced player echoed sentiments similar to those above in the following way:

> Yeah. There are players, those players get loads and loads of stick for being injured, and the [other] players begin to doubt whether they're genuine injuries, or whether they just don't want to play, and that is definitely something that happens. Players are quick to pick-up on things like that. 'Oh he doesn't fancy this trip', or 'it's Christmas' or 'Easter', or 'you've got something on'. We've got a lad at our place ... he's had 3 or 4 ankle injuries this year, so he's being called 'glass ankle' things like that, people do get stick for being injured.

Joking and snide remarks, often deliver unpalatable messages with a softened impact (Collinson, 1988). They are a means by which players, maybe unwittingly, seek to control those among their team perceived as not pulling their weight. The steady stream of cutting remarks experienced by players who are 'slaughtered' operate as a type of social control to minimize perceived malingering. Most players at some time become the target of jokes and banter among team mates. It was claimed by most players that the banter is not serious. Indeed for some the banter was understood to be a source of team spirit which fostered camaraderie. Yet sociologically it is clear that it is also a source of fear for players because it raises the threat of them becoming viewed as injury-prone, and as malingerers. The consequences of this type of banter were described by one former player in some (emotional) detail, although the ways in which he became discredited were, for the most part, unrecognised by him. Even when describing his early career, he recalled the numerous injuries he sustained:

I went to [my first professional club] and even at a young age I had a lot of soft tissue injuries. I had Achilles injuries, tendon injuries, calf injuries, hamstring injuries, groin injuries, even at an early stage ... All my career is littered with injuries. I have got so many photographs of me lying on the bed having treatment, probably more than actually when I played.

Like many other players interviewed, it is clear that he understood the way in which managers, physiotherapists and significant others develop impressions of players – impressions related in particular to the personalities and characteristics of players – especially those who are perceived to be injury-prone. He stated that he tried to conceal his injuries from managers and physiotherapists:

I have even pulled calf muscles just jogging and it got to the extent when I was at [a second division club] where I didn't like to tell people that I was injured. I got to the stage where I would go and have treatment at the [local] hospital and then come into training the next day. The situation would be, 'Oh [the player] isn't injured again!' I very much wanted to play all the time and when I got injured I wanted to see if I could get over the injuries without telling the manager or physiotherapist ... I tried to cover them up.

He suggested that some managers put pressure on him to play, but that, like most other players interviewed, he put the greatest pressure on *himself* to be available for selection. He could not seem to stem the injuries he sustained regularly both in matches and training and one manager even said to him, 'Oh, you can't be injured again, it must be all in your head'. In order to avoid this type of discrediting at one club, the player described a ritual – which may or may not be uncommon – he would carry out on a daily basis if necessary:

I use to come in in the morning and I would go to the toilet and strap my calf up and put tracksuit bottoms on, and then we use to go out training and I would have to try and mask it. Sometimes there were situations

where they would say that somebody had to go in goal, so I would go into goal to keep out of the way.

He said that he was ridiculed by team mates and that he could recall doubts being expressed about other players who were injured and whether or not they were 'swinging the lead', but, he continued, 'I would have hoped that they would have seen that I was genuine enough to see that I wanted desperately to get fit'. His desperation to be seen as 'genuine' by significant others – to be seen to possess an appropriate attitude – led him on a number of occasions to play against medical advice, and to manufacture circumstances in which he could conceal his injuries. Underpinning his thoughts was a fundamental desire to play and not to miss games. Yet, further to this desire, the actions he described became increasingly understandable, from a sociological standpoint, in terms of strategies to avoid being discredited:

> I was the butt of jokes and I had the mickey taken out of me. They would say, 'Oh you are not injured again!' I remember [a former colleague] saying to me once when I told him I had just pulled a muscle, 'You can't have pulled a muscle'. I said, 'I'm telling you, it has just gone now, my hamstring has just gone'. It was a bloody nightmare to be honest ... things had gone on that long regarding me that it makes a lot of difference, you have been injured that many times that you don't want people to be saying, 'Oh, he's not injured again'. I would take a chance on playing when I wasn't probably 100% fit. *I felt stigmatized throughout the injuries, that is why I took a chance* (Emphasis added).

The joking and banter directed at this player may be viewed by some players in relation to the generation of team morale and high spirits 'among the lads', but for the player himself it had other unacknowledged and unintended effects. In terms of highlighting sociologically the subtleties of social control, the player in question, in order to avoid accusations of being soft or a malingerer had, on various occasions, concealed his injuries by seeking out treatment at a local NHS hospital, strapped joints in the privacy of the changing room toilets, and generally hidden injuries and their effects as best he could from others, even if this meant

volunteering to go in goal. The joking and banter might be said to have the effect (or maybe unintended consequence) of social control (Collinson, 1988) which leads players to conceal injuries and to play with pain in order not to be considered as having a bad attitude; in short, banter directed at injured players reminds those who are 'fit' of the dangers of being viewed as 'a shammer'. Associated with this point – and a related aspect of football culture – is that players who are unable to play as a result of injury and who can, therefore, make no direct contribution to the team on the field of play, may be seen as being of little value to the club, and may be ignored, or otherwise inconvenienced.

Inconveniencing Injured Players

The special status of players who are injured and therefore unavailable for selection is expressed in a variety of ways, all of which have the effect of reminding injured players that, for as long as they are injured, they are of little use to the club. In his book, *Left Foot Forward*, in which he described a year in his life as a Charlton Athletic player in the mid-1990s, Garry Nelson (1995) pointed out, for example, that players who were in the first team squad at Charlton and were available for selection would get four complementary tickets for each game, but that players who were injured would only receive two complementary tickets. However, of greater importance in terms of understanding processes of discreditation is the fact that, in most clubs, injured players have a daily routine which is significantly different from – and which is often deliberately designed to be less comfortable than – that of players who are fit. The latter normally report for training at about 10.00am and finish training about 12.30 or 1.00pm, following which they will normally eat together at the club and then have the rest of the day free. Injured players, on the other hand, are normally required to report to the ground before players who are fit, and are kept at the ground long after the others have departed, often until about 4.30pm. The following quote illustrates what, for injured players, might be taken as an example of a 'normal day':

> You have to report for 9:30 to the physio. Training usually starts at 10:30 for the fit players. You maybe have treatment, ice or something like that depending on what the injury is. We have treatment from 9:30 to 10:30,

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and then we will do some kind of circuit, upper body circuit or actually on the injury itself and be done for about 12:00. We report back in the afternoon for about 1:00 for some more treatment and then we go home ... We come in earlier and stay later to fit round the fit players. I mean the physio sometimes takes the fit players on sprinting or running sessions, and the injured players will fit round the fit players.

Of course, part of the different routine of injured players is related to the fact that they cannot take part in normal training sessions and that they require physiotherapy or other treatment. However, the different routine for injured players cannot be explained simply in terms of their need for specialist treatment for, in many clubs, the routine is deliberately designed to 'inconvenience' injured players and thus to act as a disincentive to them to remain on the injured list for one day longer than is absolutely necessary. This idea was expressed by a second division goalkeeper who suggested that 'it's okay to make it difficult so that players don't want to be injured'. He elaborated on this point by suggesting that:

I think it's a deliberate policy in one or two clubs to make it difficult in the treatment room and to make life uncomfortable so that players don't see it [being injured] as being an easy option, and there are times when some young pro's sometimes see it as an easy option when things are going badly. They think, 'Oh, I'll have two weeks here, and step out of the firing line'.

One physiotherapist who had worked in two football clubs but who now worked in another sport referred to the manner in which players are inconvenienced. To some extent he repeats the point made by the goalkeeper quoted above that players who are being treated are inconvenienced, although while the goalkeeper appears to think this procedure is necessary, the physiotherapist appears to think otherwise. He said: 'I've frequently had it said to me when I've worked at professional soccer clubs: "Inconvenience the injured player. We don't want them too comfortable in the treatment room, sitting in the warm when the rest are out there in the cold". There's this paranoia, I never could work it out, I don't know why it really exists'. Asked what this policy of 'inconveniencing' the injured

player involved, he replied: 'Get them in earlier for training. Keep them after training has finished so that all of the fit players are going home and they have to stay behind for extra treatment'. A similar idea was expressed by another club physiotherapist who said, 'I think if a player is injured they have to work harder and longer and be inconvenienced'. He explained that he couldn't tolerate some players 'tossing it off, or taking the piss', and therefore injured players were made to 'work their nuts off...so they'd rather train than be injured'. He added, by way of clarification, that:

> The players that we have to provide extra stimulus for, for want of a better word, have probably got some political thing going on at the club, with the manager or with the boys, or are not in the team basically. They're saying, 'I'm not going to train, I'm going to chuck my hamstring in, and we can't have that. So we don't have that by working them hard when they're injured.

Describing how injured players were 'inconvenienced', he said that 'you have to make it naughty' and added 'I will keep him [the injured player] here until the traffic builds up on the motorway'. Shortly after taking over at Tottenham Hotspur in 1998, George Graham was similarly reported to have introduced a system which involved keeping injured players at the ground until the build-up of traffic at the start of the rush-hour on the M25. Reflecting on the changes he made when he was appointed as manager, Graham remarked that, 'I have never accused any player of putting on an injury but what can happen is that the treatment room becomes too comfortable'. He went to make the point that: 'When I arrived, I changed the treatment hours – the last session now finishes at 4pm. That's just about when the M25 becomes absolutely hellish. It's surprising how many people now manage to get out of the treatment room well ahead of the rush hour' (*The Observer*, 12 February, 2000).

However, not all the players who were interviewed recognised that they were being 'inconvenienced' – as described by a number of physiotherapists – and some suggested that the daily timetables for injured and recovering players were designed by club physiotherapists with their best interests in mind. One former

Premiership player, who retired because of a recurring knee problem, recalled the approach to treatment and rehabilitation of one of his physiotherapists:

> The best physio I've ever had was the physio I used to have at [a previous club] and he had players in at 9 'clock, and if you could run then you were out running with him ... You always say a good physio is, if you are injured, you dread being injured. At [his former club] you were doing more while you were injured than when you were playing, because you were working from morning to 5 o'clock and you'd be running, doing circuits in the afternoon with treatment in between just to keep your heart rate up and everything in condition.

When asked whether there existed at this club a policy of deliberately separating fit and unfit players, the same player said:

> It was just a case of they [injured players] were working that hard, they were in at 9 o'clock they were out running, they were in the gym after they'd done the running and then in the gym again after lunch, it was just a case of you didn't see the first team because you were working as hard as you can yourself. I think that is the way to do it because if you've been out a while and then go back and thrust straight back into training with things a 100 miles an hour, you just can't physically keep up with it.

Playing with injuries

To summarise thus far, the data collected for this study indicate that the vast majority of players are not malingerers. That said, the notion of malingering seems to be part of the mythology of professional football which is reproduced as an aspect of the occupational culture to ensure that players do not shirk. Ingham (1975) suggests that the labeling of non-visible injuries in particular as 'faking' is an aspect of the occupational value of endurance, and he goes on to make the point that the unnecessary hardships that players endure 'would not be tolerated by workers in other areas of commercial life' (p.365).

The commonly held view that injured players should be inconvenienced expresses a fear that players might feign injury – that is, view a period of injury as an 'easy option' – in order to avoid the rigours of training or playing. The interviews with present and former players suggest that such a fear is for the most part unfounded, for the central value of continuing to play, whenever possible, through pain and injury is also recognised and internalised by the players themselves; indeed, players learn from a relatively young age to 'normalise' pain and to accept playing with pain and injury as part and parcel of the life of a professional footballer. One player described the situation as follows: 'Players are so desperately keen to get back that 90% of them come back to play long before they have made a full recovery. I am no different ... there is desperation to show that you are keen'. One indication of players' willingness to play with injuries came in response to a question in which players were asked how many matches, in a full season, they played without any kind of pain or injury. Many players – and, in particular, senior players, who had often accumulated many injuries over the years – indicated that they played no more than five or six games in a season entirely free from injury and one senior player said: 'There's not one player goes out to play who's 100% fit'.

To repeat from Chapter Three, without exception all players interviewed stated that they could not bear to miss matches, and would play with an injury if possible. All players try to play on when injured during matches and both managers and physiotherapists expect players to continue where at all possible. Players admitted that they became impatient during treatment and rehabilitation and often returned to training and matches before they had fully recovered; they hope in part that this keenness to play is viewed by managers as a demonstration of their 'good attitude'. In these respects, the attitudes and behaviour of players reflect the importance attached to *playing* as a central value in football culture. One physiotherapist, who had been working in the gym with a young player who had a knee injury, graphically illustrated the way in which this central value is brought home to young players in particular. The player had been working hard and had expressed some satisfaction with his gym work. However, the physiotherapist made it clear to the young player that working in the gym was of little importance:

I said '[the manager] doesn't mind whether you're absolutely pathetic working in the gym as long as you're out there on a Saturday ... it doesn't matter if [the manager's] got Schwarzenegger working in the gymnasium ... he wants players out there on the pitch'. And the young player thought because he was working hard in the gym he was earning his money. Which is not the case. You earn your money by going out there and playing on the pitch. That's where you earn your money.

Players who had experienced a long-term injury spoke of a form of 'suffering' which develops out of their day-to-day life and is associated with a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence: that is, players who sustain long-term injuries lack the means necessary to support their positive self-image as players. In these situations, players may experience a variety of emotions, including guilt, depression and frustration. Serious injuries may result in a downward spiral in relation to self-image as players encounter diminished control over their daily lives. Some players indicated that, particularly if they were recovering from injury more slowly than had been anticipated, they felt discredited and blamed themselves for failing to meet time and fitness expectations. Other players reported that at some stage in their rehabilitation, the club manager and/or physiotherapist had lost patience with them, or at least had lost their initial sympathy. In addition, of course, players with long-term injuries may experience a great deal of anxiety associated with the loss of their place in the team and the uncertainty surrounding their future career prospects. Injury and the loss of their place in the team may also be associated, even in the short term, with financial losses (particularly through the loss of playing bonuses which, especially in lower division clubs, may be an important part of a player's total income) and, outside of the football context, with strained relationships with the player's partner or other family members.

Suffering in silence? Players' experience of injury

For players with long-term injuries, the social conditions in which they exist contribute to their suffering a loss of self. These social conditions include the way in which treatment and rehabilitation regimes restrict the day-to-day movements

and 'free-time' of players. Moreover, players begin to feel isolated and they develop, to greater or lesser degrees, a sense that they are becoming a burden both in and around the club, and to others at home. These characteristics combine to limit the possibility for players to construct alternative valued self-images and relegates them to a marginal position in relation to the club's central activity. In the following section, patterns of 'suffering' are identified and analysed in terms of the ways in which they combine to produce a loss of self as a result of the player's inability to take part in the one activity which, above all others, sustains their positive self-image.

Badly injured players endure narrow, restricted lives which, for them, contrast sharply with those of their 'fit' counterparts who can contribute directly in terms of playing. Their injuries tend to become the sole focus of their lives as treatment, initial periods of discomfort and disability, and the constraints of 'mundane' activities (physiotherapy treatment and rehabilitation exercises, and so forth) structure and fill their days. Moreover, the tendency for club physiotherapists and managers to discredit players – and to treat them as though they were malingerers – may lead them, in turn, to adopt a more restricted demeanour around the club.

The course of serious injuries is often unpredictable and may foster uncertainty and fear for players. The unpredictability arises from 'grey' or uncertain periods of time in which players, for example, undergo and recuperate from operations, or when they attempt to progress too hastily, which is nearly always the case, and the injury breaks down or regresses to some degree. Consequently, players tend to develop *narrow* time frames which consist of good and bad or 'black' days, and they may become focused on thoughts of 'just getting through the week'. In addition, players tend to *test* their injury constantly in the hope of detecting signs of improvement. The combination of direct restrictions and physical debility cause many players to experience frustration which may, when considered in light of the restrictive timetables and the lack of involvement for those injured in training and on match days, result in many feeling socially isolated. Writing in *The Times* (23 January, 1999), Manchester United and England international, Gary Neville, described the way in which his experience of injury was restricting:

Being injured is just about the worst thing for any footballer to endure. I'm lucky because these two weeks that I've been out is probably the longest time I've been unavailable since the start of my career, but it still makes you feel like an outsider. You have to get in about 15 or 20 minutes earlier than you would have to if you were fit to train and, after you've had your first session of treatment, you do gym work before lunch and then have more treatment in the afternoon. You end up getting home later, too, which makes everyone extra keen to avoid injury. To make it worse, I was the only one in the treatment room last week, so I found myself staring out of the window and listening to the rest of the lads laughing and joking while I was feeling miserable.

The tangible (or direct) restrictions on daily life and, consequently, the diminished sense of self which derives, in part, from their status as 'non-producers', can lead players to develop a sense of isolation from what are for them meaningful networks of social relationships. In short, spending their days on a restrictive treatment and rehabilitation programme is isolating because firstly, the injury alone sets the player apart from others; secondly, treatment tends to take place in separate locations; and thirdly, the attention of players focuses on themselves (and their injury), and they become self-examining and inner-directed.

All the players interviewed spoke of feeling isolated and lonely during periods rehabilitating from injury. One Premiership player said, 'I've felt quite out on my own really for the last year, and I've had some pretty depressing times, but you've just got to get on with it'. Another player from a small Division Three club, who was asked to describe the emotions he felt during rehabilitation said:

It's the worse thing ever being injured anyway. I'm like a bear with a sore head when I'm injured and that's fact. I just don't enjoy being injured at all. You are not with the lads, you are not playing, or anything like that. When people are saying 'when are you going to be fit?' you want to tell them what they want to hear, so you are always optimistic so they always put that thought in their mind. Then, when you are not, you feel as if you have let everybody down, by not being fit. And if you break down, well,

I've broken down in training, and before games, and the day before a game, and you are that low anyway that you just don't want to talk to anybody.

Reflecting upon his more serious injuries, one experienced player spoke of the fact that when other players go out to train, 'you are stuck in the gym doing your straight legs or what have you, and you are just left to yourself. It's a very lonely business, to be perfectly truthful'. And another player talked emotionally of the period immediately following an operation to his back which kept him side-lined for more than a season:

I remember the first time I saw myself after the operation, and I started crying, you know, because my back was just such a mess. I had staples in my back, there were drips coming out of them ... The first thing I wanted to do was to get up and walk and have a shower, it was just an absolute mess. I thought, I'll never be able to play football again. It was such a slow process and I think, you know, I'm the world's worst watcher, so for a year it was a nightmare, it really was a nightmare.

The idea that the injured player is, at least for the duration of his injury, of little use to the club may be expressed in a variety of ways. For example, a former First Division player described the scenario at his club which involved the manager ignoring injured players, even when both were present together in the treatment room, in the following way: 'The manager was like any manager in those days. He didn't like you injured. He would ignore you. He would always talk to somebody else'. The same player went on to describe a situation in which he was receiving treatment for a thigh injury:

I've done my thigh, and basically what I want to do is get back playing. I've been out for about 7 or 8 weeks and I asked [the physio] to shave my leg, and what I was going to do was put tape bandage round to hold the muscle in place, just for a bit of firmness. I was lying on the bed in the treatment room and [the physio] was shaving and he [the manager] came in, and he wouldn't talk to you.

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'What are you doing?' he asked [the physio] when it's obvious what he's doing.

'I'm shaving [the player's] leg'.

'Why?'

"Because he's asked me to".

He was ignoring me, and this is the way things went. I mean you got used to it. He wasn't snubbing you, he was just annoyed that you were injured. He was upset that you were injured, you know, he had a cob on [he was very annoyed]. But he wouldn't talk to you. He would talk to [the physio].

'How is he?' he asked, when you'd be sitting there.

He [the physio] would say, 'Well he's alright isn't he. He wants to put a tight bandage round and wants to try it and we are playing at West Ham next week and he wants to get through till then, and he's been doing a bit of running'.

What happened then was he said to me, 'Nobody plays in my side with a strapping on', and I'd already arranged with [the physio] to get a long pair of shorts so nobody could see it.

So I said [to the manager], 'Well, it's got f*** all to do with you really, it's my leg'.

He said, 'No, it's not your leg, it's [the Football Club's] leg. And no player plays with a bandage on'.

Perhaps surprisingly, such attitudes are still commonly to be found amongst managers. One current player said that some managers 'have a theory that injured players aren't worth spit basically ... You are no use to us if you are injured'. However, some managers were more sympathetic; the same player said that 'some managers always go out of their way to talk to you as an injured player'. One club doctor pointed out that the relationship between the manager and injured players varies from one manager to another: 'I mean it depends a little bit on the manager ... some managers obviously feel very uncomfortable with injured players, don't know what to say to them, feel as if they're being let down in some way'. Many players referred to experiences with managers whose managerial style was summed up by one player as 'roll your sleeves up and get on with it ... the old sergeant major jobs'. This player said that his current manager had been both

sympathetic and helpful in relation to his injury problems, but that previous managers had been much less sympathetic: 'I am used to someone saying: 'Are you not fit yet? What's the matter with you? I want you tomorrow. I want you Wednesday and then I want you Friday. Get your arse in gear'. Another player described the attitude of one of his former managers towards injured players as follows: 'You're not meant to be injured. You should be playing. You get paid to play. He totally ignored you when you were in the treatment room. His attitude was: 'You're no use to me anymore'. He added that his present manager had a similar attitude:

> My present manager is like that. I've heard him speaking to one of the players. He said: 'You're no use to me now, so what's the point in talking to you and seeing how you are'. I've been injured three weeks now and he's asked me for the first time today how I am. Just as I'm getting back to fitness.

A similar point was made by one of the physiotherapists, who said that some managers took the view that: 'At the end of the day, you're a non-producer, as they say, if you're injured. You're not playing Saturday and you're no good to anyone. Some managers put it that way'.

The lack of sympathy which some managers have for injured players may mean that, on occasions, managers may insist on players training even when they are injured. One senior player said that, following surgery on his knee, he had been advised by his surgeon not to run on hard surfaces before the knee had healed properly, but that his manager insisted that he took a full part in the training programme, which included running on a hard track. The player concerned was the club captain and, he said, the manager insisted that he 'set an example' to the other players. Another player at the same club, but under a different manager, was made to take part in a full training session despite the fact that the previous day he had cracked a rib in a first team match and was having difficulty breathing.

The social isolation experienced by players seems most obvious in larger clubs, where players are able to 'lose themselves'. Clubs with smaller squads tend to be

closer knit with players more intimate with the manager. Furthermore, it is only at a handful of clubs (although the number may be increasing slowly) that medical facilities are situated at the training ground, thus providing a greater opportunity for injured players to have contact with the manager and other players. In the light of the loneliness brought on by social, and geographical isolation, a number of players suggested that the contacts which players do have with the manager and significant others, throughout periods of rehabilitation, can assume tremendous meaning. A number of younger players in particular have suggested that some limited contact can make isolation bearable, if only in a limited way. One young player spoke, however, of the way in which contact with the manager might hinder 'actual' progress and may add a pressure in terms of time-related expectations. He said:

> Because that contact is minimal, whatever the manager does say to you, you sort of take it to heart. Like if he comes in one day and says, 'how are you getting on? Come on you should be cracking on a bit now, you should be getting there now, you should be getting fit', you know, you think, should I be getting there? should I be getting fit? And because he's the manager and it is his decision about you at the end of the day, you might start questioning yourself. I don't feel right but, you know, should I be getting fitter?

Conversely, many players referred to banter with the other players as being significant in terms of making them feel, if only in a minor way, involved and a member of the team. One player spoke of the relationship between fit players and the long term injured, suggesting that: 'The one thing is, if you've got a serious injury, the last thing you want is people patting you on the back saying, "Oh never mind". You want to still be part of it, you want to be part of the lads as well. If you are out for several months, it's so easy to become totally detached'.

Following closely upon their feelings of isolation, some players suggested that they had become a burden, either to the manager or the physio, or to family members. For them these experiences were demeaning for players in terms of their self-confidence, principally because they felt that they had little power over their

situations or the quality of their existence. For players who sustain severely disabling injuries, feelings of uselessness intensify as onerous and continuous obligations fall to wives, partners and other family members. One player, who had had a number of knee operations and who had broken down a number of times during rehabilitation, described the way in which his situation made him feel, and his relationship with the club physiotherapist: 'I had spent sort of from October to December really fart-arsing about, trying to get fit, but the injury kept coming back and blowing up. In the end I didn't know what to do. I felt I became a pain in his [the physio's] arse, do you know what I mean? I was a sort of burden to him'.

Conclusion

This chapter, which examines the shifting identities of injured players, focuses in part on how they may come to be discredited. The discrediting process experienced by players in certain social contexts are similar in kind to the way in which other people – for example, people identified as possessing a mental illness or who possess a visible disability, single parents, AIDS victims (Charmaz, 2002) – who display pathological tendencies by deviating from norms may be open to stigma. Long-term injuries raise several dilemmas for players. Firstly, players begin to consider the fragile and uncertain nature of their existence as professional footballers. Secondly, players depend more heavily on significant others to help them get through their time, both at home and around the club. They become inner-directed and sensitive to the intentions and meanings of others towards them; they want to feel involved and to be valued. Yet, at the very time when these feelings develop, their ties to others are weakened and isolation and loneliness intensifies. Thirdly, in a culture which emphasises *playing*, and which normalises playing with pain and taking risks, those who do not *play* are denied, or deny themselves, the means necessary to sustain a meaningful life and a valued sense of self identity.

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[1] Data for this chapter comes from some interviews conducted with club doctors and physiotherapists as part of the managing injuries in professional football project (Waddington *et al*, 1999).

Chapter Six

Transferring and the Transformation of Self

The relatively fragile nature of playing careers in professional football has been highlighted in Chapters Four and Five in relation to the injuries sustained by players. During interview, however, other than periods of time inactive because of injury, the other most vulnerable passages arose for players when they were, firstly, omitted from the starting line-up and, secondly, during job relocation. The central focus of this chapter therefore concerns the transferring of players from one club to another. This examination will not involve a description of the mechanics of the process of transferring in terms of the general patterns of who speaks to whom and where and when, but instead will look at the way in which this process is initiated – that is, how it comes to be that a player is transferred in the first instance – and what a transfer means in terms of the player's sense of 'self'. In other words, the object of this chapter is to relate the process of transferring from one club to another – a significant turning point or clear punctuation mark in the onward-moving career of a player – to transformations of identity and self-conception.

In this regard there are two central and related points to be made concerning the process of transferring and these were expressed by all the players interviewed, regardless of their status or of the clubs for whom they play. Firstly, of those players who had moved to new clubs – two players interviewed had never experienced this process – all considered their moves, without exception, to be positive in terms of their career development at the time of the transfer. In other words, they were happy to leave their old club and pleased to join the new one. Secondly, when a player moves from one club to another, he moves to a club which desires his skills. It is this desire – the thought of being wanted – which strengthens his sense of self-worth and alleviates, if only periodically, the uncertainties which characterise the periods in which players transfer.

In cases where a player moves to a club of a higher status – in terms of league or league position, or even economic position – he must learn to deal with the status transformation which such a move may bestow upon him. All players 'dream' of moves to *big* clubs and, whilst there are anxieties associated with the 'high expectations' which, from the perspective of the player, such moves can generate, most, if not all, players perceive such moves 'positively'. Moreover, moves to *big* clubs involve, what for a player is, a 'positive' transformation of identity and status. They may also be thought of as benchmarks of 'progress' in terms of their career and in most cases may lead to an enhancement of 'self'. Not all types of transfer, sociologically speaking, are as simple to describe. Most other moves are more complex in terms of a transformation of self, for they involve a period of *rejection* of one kind or another; for example, a player may be dropped from the first team for an extended period of time, or never really establish himself as a first team player, or even think he is being *used* in one way or another by the manager (and by 'the club' more generally). During these times players experience a heightened sense of uncertainty about their future and a loss of self-esteem and status. They feel unwanted, isolated from their team-mates, let down – often by managers with whom they have attempted to identify and establish a relationship – and some, but particularly older players, come to feel that they are treated like a 'commodity' (see Chapter Nine). Insofar as they are able, players must learn to cope with this loss of self yet, like periods of absence from the first team due to injury, they are denied access to the one activity which enables them to reinforce their sense of identity as players and that provides them with an opportunity to re-establish their sense of feeling needed and useful. Consequently, it is easier to understand why players view a move to another club in a 'positive' manner. So, players want to feel wanted and the new club offers them a fresh challenge and, most importantly, the feeling that their skills are indispensable.

The 'Big' Move[1]

There are few aspects of the career of a professional footballer that were expressed in such straightforward terms by the interviewees as the movement of a player (usually younger or lower division player) to a 'big' club. One player interviewed, whose comment is suggestive of many others, said that 'every player playing in

the lower divisions secretly yearns for the big move, but it doesn't come to many'. This point was borne out by the research of Gowling (1974) who discovered that in the season 1972/73, just 16% of all transfers involved players moving to clubs in higher divisions. This relatively small percentage is underscored by the figures found for the season 1999/2000, in which approximately 13% of all transfers involved players moving to clubs in higher divisions. Of the players interviewed for this study, those who had experienced this type of transfer spoke, as one might expect, only in 'positive' terms about their moves – even the moves that involved geographical relocation. For these players, their 'dream' had been fulfilled. One young, first division player, for example, described his experiences in the following manner:

> **Player**: [My first club] is a decent ground and everything, a nice ground, but you go up to [the club to which he transferred] and it's unbelievable. Looking around that place and the whole set-up there is fantastic really. It was like a different world from what I was used to so I was really impressed. They knew that and they offered me a good contract. I had it in my head what sort of figures I was looking for and they offered me them straight away. I wasn't going to ask for stupid money … and they offered me that straight away and so I signed without any qualms, very little haggling really at all.
>
> **MR**: So you were pleased with that move?
>
> **Player**: Yeah, really chuffed with it. I was going to a massive club and I thought it was going to be my dream move … I was really, really pleased with it, going into the Premiership was all I wanted to do. I was playing against people like Ian Wright and other people like that. I've always been a big Arsenal fan and we played against them in our third or fourth game. Arsenal at home: it was fantastic.

A former third division player interviewed experienced an even more dramatic elevation in which he moved from a team which had then been recently promoted from the Conference League, for whom he played only fifteen times (scoring ten goals), to a Premier League club. Focusing at first on the financial dimension of the move, this player described how his salary increased by over 300%, yet he

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realised that, by comparison to many other players in the Premier League, his new salary was only 'small fry'. He said that: 'It is a lot money. You've got to put things in reality. It is a lot of money and to earn that is great. I'd gone from two years earlier and not being wanted at a fourth division club to playing in the Premier League. It was just unbelievable'. When asked whether there were great differences between these clubs, he replied:

> Yeah, when I think back now it's high profile and more so now. It was high profile then, everybody wants to know you and you go to grounds and places like Anfield and there are 5,000 people milling about outside; you're getting off the coach and pushing through people and that's the way it was and it was good. Everything, to a certain extent, when you asked for it you got it. I watch it now and I think it's ten times worse now than what it was then, and I mean worse in a nice way. I think now the top Premier League footballers are not footballers they are superstars; the Beckhams, the Giggses, your Bergkamps. They are all superstars, and now when I was there, I think it was [19]93 season ... it was good. I enjoyed it.

The examples above both describe situations in which players move to clubs in the FA Premier League. What was common for both of these players was that their moves came about, from their perspective, with little pre-warning and their acceptance of the contract-offer was almost immediate and with little consultation or negotiation. In the case of the first player, for example, he played for his former club in the first game of the Division One season. He was transferred the following week in time to represent his new club in their opening game of the Premier League season the following Saturday. Both players expressed few reservations about the moves and, even when pressed, claimed their over-riding emotion to be one of excitement in relation to the expectations of their new managers, teammates and supporters. The latter player in this connection said that, in fact, he put the greatest pressure on himself and remarked: 'I wanted to prove it to myself that I was good enough at this level'.

Another player who transferred from a third to a first division team also expressed this type of sentiment although his move, which will be described in more detail,

was different from the other two in that he was receiving a great deal of praise for his performances and, in addition, he was keen to play at a higher level: in his words, he was 'looking for a move'. Moreover, an understanding of the way in which *this* player came to be transferred is useful as it may be compared to the types of transfers, to be described later, most of which involve periods in which the players experience a 'rejection'. This third division player was twenty-two years old and had played the first year of his two-year contract. He said:

> I was doing okay, not blowing my own trumpet and everything but the papers were writing nice things. I was still a young lad and was showing in games. I was shining in matches and people were linking me with other clubs and saying people are looking but it is all paper talk. You don't get any feedback from the manager and there's nothing definite ever said. You're never sure that anything is going to happen. You keep working and it came to the point where [my manager] wanted me to sign again, but I knew that that was the time and I was going to go. And I made it clear to him that I wasn't going to sign another contract with them. I wanted to see what was going to happen.

The refusal to sign a new contract was a gamble for this player in a number of ways. The greatest danger for him would be for his contract to expire without other clubs showing any signs of interest. This situation would have been the worst case scenario insofar as his sense of self-esteem and confidence were concerned, for it would have meant that, for the time being at least, his assessment of his talents were misjudged. On another level, his manager may have questioned his loyalty to the club and his teammates may have cast doubts about his 'attitude'; in other words, suggesting that he possessed an over-inflated opinion of his own skills. The situation for this player developed 'favourably', however, and with one year of his contract still to run he received an offer to transfer to a first division club, and his club were willing to accept the transfer fee offered. When asked whether *he* thought he had taken a gamble, he explained his understanding of the situation in the following way:

The gamble is this: you are happy, you know everybody at [my former club], and you are settled. We were doing well and they liked me and I could have signed a good contract [with them] and I would have been quite content but, again, I am a quietish and introverted kind of bloke. It's a big move for me to move away from [my former club] which is not so far away from Middlesborough where all my family live and I can get to see them in a day. I was moving quite a long way away but it was a better deal and everything and it was first division football. I was never in any doubt to be honest that I was going to go down to speak to them and sign a contract. I never thought twice about it. I was going to go and sign and play in the first division.

He had been in touch with a Professional Footballers Association (PFA) representative who had advised that, relative to other players, the financial terms and conditions were appropriate for someone of his age and experience. When asked about the degree to which he had discussed the move with other people he said:

My girlfriend came with me to speak to the manager. We'd been living together and we were going to get married soon so she came with me. To be honest it was something I was going to do. You speak with them, you speak with people but I was always going to sign to see if I could make it at the next level. In hindsight it was the best thing I could do. You move on and it takes you half a second to sign and people are looking at you at first. It is awkward and you don't know anyone but the banter starts after about a week and you start receiving some stick and then you are involved and it is the best thing you can ever do. When you go and play at a higher level with better players everything improves. The money improves, the training, the whole thing, everything about it improves. There's just a little bit of self-doubt about actually making the step up but once you've made it, it's the best thing you can do ... I've always been glad I've made the moves, having said that, once the opportunities had arose, the little doubts and that were never big enough that I ever thought about not moving. I

was always going to move. The football and the opportunity is always more of an incentive.

In a number of senses, the players who are transferred to 'big' clubs develop dominant self-images that are akin to what Adler and Adler (1989) refer to as the 'gloried self', which is a consequence of individuals becoming imbued with celebrity. Thus, in some cases, players are raised to the status of stars and can regularly read their names and statements in local and national newspapers and even see themselves on television. For many of the players, their move will have fulfilled their dreams and until then, they would not have interacted with people who accorded them such levels of adulation and importance. The players interviewed were profoundly affected by their moves and they all indicated that they 'grew in confidence' – in other words, they developed a self-image that was significantly enhanced. An understanding of these types of moves is useful insofar as they highlight a number of central differences between the types of transfers experienced by players. In the case of 'big' moves, the players involved are usually ever-present in the first-team of their clubs and they speak of having few problems with fellow players or managers. The moves take place relatively quickly from the moment a transfer offer is received, although for some there may be a period of prior rumour and speculation. Most transfer offers are accepted immediately by the players (and in many cases by the respective clubs) and this is almost certainly because they view the move as a means of career progress. The other types of transfer to be examined are more complex as they nearly all involve a period in which the player experiences a rejection of some nature.

'Doing is Being'[2]

The types of transfers that will be examined in this section – it is not claimed that all types of transfers will be examined – are those which involve a player being rejected, in one way or another, from the first team or the first team squad. Some players, for example, consider themselves to be established first team footballers whereas other, usually younger professionals, are endeavouring to become regulars. For nearly all players however, their careers are relatively short and the possibility of rejection is always upon them: a loss of form or the possibility of a

younger, better player emerging from the youth team ranks are among the constantly problematic features of their occupational lives. This discussion however will not focus on the way in which a player copes psychologically with rejection: that is, this section will not attempt to understand the social-psychological processes in terms of how a player deals with his perceived rejection. Rather, the object of this section is to explain how players come to maintain or adapt their 'self-conceptions' to changing circumstances and in relation to their new levels of involvement.

Unless players sustain an injury or are suspended, the only other times they will be obliged to watch rather than play is if the manager does not select them. It was noted in Chapter Three that one of the basic cultural values in professional football is attached to *playing* and it was suggested that 'active' involvement *in matches* was the context in which the identities of players were instilled with meaning. Players are only able to sustain their sense of self (maybe their 'gloried selves') by playing in the first team, for it is only then that they have the opportunity to feel involved and to justify fully their status, i.e., as a first team player, to themselves and to others. This point is fundamental for players in relation to the process of transferring (and injury), as it is the case that not participating in a match – in other words being left out of the manager's plans for a forthcoming game – may lead to a diminished sense of self for players as well as the generation of a large measure of uncertainty. In short, the major anchorage of self – his status as a performing member of the team – is severed and the trappings that serve to legitimise such ('powerful') self-definitions are withheld. The player now has a marginal position in relation to the central activity of the football club – first team football – and this is an indication, for him, that he is unwanted. Thus, players do not want to remain in situations where their skills are considered of marginal use and at this point (of realisation) they may decide that their futures need to lie elsewhere.

Indeed, this type of comment was common among the players interviewed and one typical example was expressed by a first division player in the following way: 'If I'm not playing regularly when I think I should be I end up moving on really because I'm not prepared to sit in the reserves for months at a time. I think the

type of player I am, I'm not the sort of superstar or anything like this, I'm just a steady sort of player. I don't have many fluctuations in my performance so if a manager goes off me I'll probably move on'. Another young, first division player expressed similar views in relation to what he considered to be his marginal position at his club: 'I thought that I wasn't going to play so I thought that I had to leave the club and go to pastures greener sort of thing and find a new club that I'd have a decent chance of playing. I honestly didn't think I was going to play at [my present club] at that stage, so I thought I had to go. If I was going to have any sort of career then I had to get away'. This player said that his present contract had run out and, although the manager had offered him a new contract, he stated that: 'I wasn't featuring at all in [the manager's] plans'. He added:

> I was nineteen at that stage and I wasn't featuring. A lot of the lads my age and lads a year younger had all been thrown into first team games. I'd played a couple of games under [my first manager] and again a couple games under [the previous manager] and under [the present manager] I'd not had a look in at all, so I was thinking that my future was sort of lying elsewhere. I wasn't going to sign at that stage. They offered me a reasonable contract for someone my age, but I thought I wasn't going to get a look in, and all I wanted to do was play football. I didn't think I was going to have a chance at the first team. I had nothing else lined up.

In fact, the manager of his team was sacked before he could find a new club and he was selected to start in the first eleven for every game for the newly appointed manager. Yet the views of this player are typical of many younger professionals who come to realise that they may have to leave their present club in order to progress. The next example, for instance, concerns a young, first division player who had been sent on loan at two separate clubs in consecutive months. In the following quote he explains how he came to realise that his position in relation to first team football was becoming increasingly marginal:

> I think it dawned on me eventually. I must have come back from another loan spell at Crewe and then played virtually another full season [at my club] without making any headway into the first team, and then at the

beginning of the next season there appeared three new signings who were all strikers and suddenly I'm thinking: 'Well, hold on, perhaps my days aren't exactly going to be here'. Well I don't need to be playing in the reserves. I've played three years in the reserves here and scored twenty goals one season, fifteen the next, and twenty five the next, so I've proved that I can play reserve team football, what I need to prove now is that I can play league football. Not three games, not ten games, but season, upon season, upon season.

This young footballer played regularly in the reserve team but he came, in time, to consider this status, which he had formerly treated as one of progress, as a sign of stagnation. Hence, whether players are already established in first team football or whether they are progressing to that position, they can only maintain their identities by either continuing to play or by continuing, in their terms, to make progress towards their goal. Being dropped from the first team because of a loss of form or failing to make headway in terms of first team appearances generates uncertainty and leads players to adopt strategies to remedy the situation. First and foremost among these strategies is for players to ask for a transfer to another club. Eamon Dunphy (1987) in his 'diary of a professional footballer' echoes these views. Having established himself in the first team (as well as playing international football with the Republic of Ireland), he is later repeatedly dropped from the first team at Millwall and expresses his thoughts – his disappointment – in the following way: 'There is nothing I can identify with any more. It is a new era, a new bunch of kids. And there is nothing there for me. The only question is how to get away' (p.143). Dunphy eventually confronts the manager, Benny Fenton, and expresses his desire to leave the club. He wrote:

I'm leaving. I went to see Benny today, and asked for a transfer. He started off by trying to soothe me, saying I was too good a player for him to let go, that I still had a part to play (a bit part?), and all the normal flannel. I was reluctant to do it, but in the end I told him he had a team of clowns, and that he was a con-man, and I wanted no more part of it. And I don't. I shall get back in the team if I stay here. But I want to go somewhere where

I can be involved. I either want to be wholly in something or right out of it. And there is no way I can be involved here any more. (p. 154)

It may be argued from the perspective of players, therefore, that the transferring process is not set in motion when a player requests to be placed on the transfer list, or even when he is put on the transfer list[3] by his manager (or 'the club'), for he will almost certainly have begun to consider his options in terms of first team football before then. Thus, the process of transferring may be said to be initiated, sociologically speaking, when a player perceives that he may not be in the future plans of his manager and is omitted or marginalized from the first eleven. For players, these uncertain times may be thought of as turning points in terms of their careers as they have few alternatives other than to take stock and re-evaluate their positions. However, the choices available are, by and large, already well know to them for it is likely that they will have observed the transition of other players who have experienced similar episodes. Thus, it might be suggested that the kinds of incidents that precipitate the revision of their identity and status are likely at some time to befall, and therefore to be equally significant to, other players of the same generation. In a host of ways, players are prepared for what may happen to them, including the subtle warning signs and the types of feelings they may experience. Insofar as changes of identity and self-conception are associated with one's 'position', therefore, it might be argued that passages of status for professional footballers are socially patterned.

To repeat then, over time, players learn – as part of the occupational culture of their group – to anchor their self-perceptions to playing. For them, playing means being selected for the first team, for that is *where the action is* (Goffman, 1967). Even younger professionals, who may be satisfied with making their mark in the reserve team at first, come to realise that they need to progress to the first team rather than stagnate at reserve team level. Thus, those footballers who consider themselves to be 'first team regulars' typically adopt an attitude to playing such that they are – to quote a player cited earlier in this chapter – 'not prepared to sit in the reserves'. In this connection, Dunphy (1987) said: 'I could never settle for reserve team football. I left Manchester United, when they were the greatest club in the country, to go to York so I could get first-team football. I'd go down to the

third division now for first team football' (p.157). The central point that he makes repeatedly throughout this section of his book, and one that underpins his general thoughts in terms of the process of transferring, is that: 'I want to go somewhere where I can feel useful and wanted' (p.168). In the following quote, Dunphy, who has received an offer to transfer to a club in the third division, explains his reaction to the news:

> I'm both excited and frightened by the thought. I've wanted a move for so long. I told Sandra [his wife], and she said 'You don't want to go to a Third Division club.' I said 'What the hell, it's a club. You can play, you can start afresh, you can find out how good you are or how bad you are without any of the prejudices that exist after eight years at one place.'
> I was really excited by the idea. I think I would have been excited if it had been Stevenage Town. Because it means *somebody wants you, someone thinks you can do a job for them*. I think players are still excited and gratified by the fact that some manager somewhere thinks that you can do a job for him (p.165: Italics added).

Other players interviewed repeated the opinion that they wanted to feel useful and involved at the club at which they were employed. One current first division player, for example, described a transfer which involved him moving down from the first division to the second. When asked whether he thought this transfer was a 'positive' move at that stage in his career he responded in the following way: 'Yeah, they were down a division, but yeah', cos I thought it was great. Somebody wanted me. I just wanted to go, you know, and play, and know I was in the first team every week and wanted'. Another first division player reflected upon his career in terms of his motivations to perform suggesting that: 'As soon as I feel as though, when somebody says 'I want you to play for me' my confidence goes woosh. He wants me. That's me anyway, my confidence grows ...'. When asked to provide further examples of when other managers had instilled such confidence in him, this player went on to recount an occasion in which he considered it appropriate to confront a former manager, for whom he had a great deal of respect, about his decision to leave him out of the team. He stated however that, if at all possible, he would avoid altercations with managers and had developed insecurity

over time in terms of what *he thought* managers thought of him and his ability as a player. Thus, in relation to his considerations of 'feeling wanted' he said:

> He used to give me that all the time. Brilliant, you know. He left me out one game because he wanted to play three at the back, and I was unhappy. I said to myself, 'I've got to go and see the manager'. Again, this paranoia, I've got to go and see the manager and have a confrontation with him. You know, I've got to go in and see him and ask why am I not playing. I've got to go in and be a little bit stroppy. But [my former manager] always knocked that out of me, so I couldn't go in with that attitude. So, I've tried my hardest and he went: 'Son, I love you. Don't worry about it. You'll play next week. I love you, come on. We need you'. And I'm saying to myself: 'We need you'. I walked out feeling a million dollars. I thought, I went in there to have a row with him and I came out feeling brilliant. And that's man management, isn't it!

Another experienced player who had played in all four Football League divisions was asked about whether former managers had made him feel welcome at their club. He said:

> The only one I've never really got on with is [a former manager], that's not just me there was four or five of us at the time he didn't like, but I would imagine all managers make you feel welcome when you're there to begin with and I think providing you're working hard and you're sort of putting it in in games, then you'll always get on well with them, but then you do have managers who take a disliking automatically to people and they won't play them, so I would say yes, they initially all make you feel welcome, then depending on how you perform and your relationship develops with him, determines what goes on after than.

In terms of understanding the process of transferring, the significance of the point that players want *to feel needed* lies in the fact that when they are dropped they must suddenly adapt themselves to the loss of sources of security and status: as far as they are concerned they are *involuntarily* deprived of a position in the team

under circumstances which reflect unfavourably upon them and their capabilities. At these stages players begin to raise questions in their minds concerning whether they are in the future plans of their manager and whether or not they will be renamed in the first eleven, yet there are few people to whom players can turn in order to get responses to these questions[4]. If these situations persist, players review their options and many feel that there are few alternatives other than to request a transfer to another club. So, feeling rejected, they – or their agents – look for alternative clubs with whom they will be able to re-establish their status as first team players. Consequently, few of the players interviewed spoke about their transfers to other clubs in anything other than positive terms. This patter is understandable if one considers that a player is moving from a club with whom he has 'failed' to another, the manager of which has asked, and is willing to pay, for his services. Once again he feels wanted and useful and, moreover, he is among a new squad of players with whom he can restore his self-confidence.

The non-person

In his classic study, *The presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1971) identified a number of 'discrepant roles', one of which he termed the 'non-person' (p.150). He suggests that some people are ascribed the status of a *non-person* when they are in social situations where they are physically and legitimately present, although lacking social acknowledgement; in similar vein, Ball (1976) referred to people who were 'possibly receiving recognition as social object, but not as a social other' (p.730). When a player is rejected he can, to varying degrees, take on the status of a *non-person* and within professional football there have been a small number of highly publicised cases where players have been shunned as if absent. Most notable in this connection is the case of former Newcastle United and England international, Robert Lee, who discovered that he had not been allocated a squad number for the coming 1999-2000 season by Dutch manager, Ruud Gullit. Michael Walker in *The Guardian* (3 August, 1999) said of this episode: 'Lee may have felt increasingly like a non-person since Ruud Gullit's arrival on Tyneside a year ago but now he has been told he is a non-player and the news shocked him when he was informed of it yesterday afternoon by Newcastle's press officer'. George Caulkin writing in *The Times* (3 August,

1999) said: 'As far as messages go, it was akin to turning up for work to find your desk has been cleared' and added that: 'It seems unquestionable that ejecting Lee is Gullit's intention'.

Hence, it is possible to identify a pattern of behaviour as a result of which the exit of a player from a football club may, in the words of one player, be 'hastened' by the actions of a manager. While managers may make their intentions known when selecting the first eleven, it seems that they also have more-or-less subtle methods of undermining some players such that they will eventually leave. A former first division player, for example, was asked to describe the way in which a transfer to a Premier league club came about. In setting the scene he spoke of his relationships with two former managers. He said:

> **Player**: I got on brilliant with [my former manager]. I had a really good relationship with him, so when he went, I felt he was betrayed by the club a little bit to be honest. He was forced to sell players that he brought through and he made a fortune for [my former club] and he didn't have any money to buy players, so we were only about middle of the table and they got rid of him and I was very unhappy with this, and thought he'd been dumped on basically, and so I wasn't particularly happy and getting a bit disillusioned at that stage and that was towards the end of one season. And then [a new manager] came in and if they could get me out they would sort of take the money, I'd been there eight years.
>
> **MR**: What gave you that impression?
>
> **Player**: You just get feelings, it was just one of them feelings reading between the lines. Certainly there wasn't any conflict between us. I got on all right with him and he was fair enough, but I think he knew that I was [my former manager's] boy sort of thing, so I think he was quite happy when I went in the end. They got decent money.

This player is unable to articulate precisely his 'feelings' concerning the new manager yet, like the player cited earlier who developed a 'paranoia' about what *he thought* managers were thinking about him, this player thought that the new manager believed that *his* loyalties lay with the former manager. It is clear that

managers may marginalize players to varying degrees and make them feel unwanted, however in these respects all managers must tread carefully for they risk shutting-out members of the playing squad who may be *used* in a supporting role (i.e., as cover for players who may get injured). In this connection, managers attempt to manage the emotions of their players since changes in power balances, brought on by feelings of rejection or failure, may lead on the part of players to the emergence of personal and psychological conflicts. For some players – like Robert Lee mentioned earlier – however, they are not so much 'cooled-out' (Goffman, 1952) as completely ignored. For these players, feelings of 'power' are absent and, consequently, their options are limited to leaving the club or waiting in hope for a change of manager. The following extract for example comes from an interview with a former first division player who returns for pre-season training expecting to renegotiate a new contract:

> **Player**: Well, when I was at [my former club] I came back for what would have been coming round to my fourth season. We'd just been relegated from the first division after a couple of seasons, and they got a new manager in who came from a Vauxhall Conference club, who hadn't managed in the league. I knew him, and I'd met him previously so I thought I'd be okay with him but he brought a lot of new players in particularly from non-league. I turned up for the first day of pre-season training and I didn't have any kit and I didn't have a kit number so I realised the writing was on the wall from day one. Never even played a game for him.
>
> **MR**: How did you feel about that?
>
> **Player**: Oh, I was very, very angry, very disappointed because in the previous two years I'd probably played 75 to 80 first division games, and I was a far better player than the players he was bringing in. I mean I knew I was because they had been playing in the Vauxhall Conference or even below! And suddenly I was training on my own after sort of three years of doing my best and training hard because I was always fit. I couldn't believe it.

This player was bitter about this situation, and to compound his disappointment and sense of rejection he found himself isolated from the first team squad during training sessions. When asked to expand on these experiences, he replied: 'I was training on my own in pre-season: I just wasn't included in anything so I just went off and kept fit on my own. Just like the lads were playing sort of a practice game or something, I was going round the pitch doing a twelve-minute run or something'. The manager thus treated him as if he was of no importance to the team and his previous self-defined status, that of first team player, no longer held true. The intentions of the new manager, like those of former Newcastle manager Ruud Gullit referred to above, seem clear; put simply, to eject the player. When asked what contact he had with the manager during this time he said:

> **Player**: The manger wasn't saying anything to me, he'd made it clear that it was time and that he'd let me know if anyone showed any interest. At the same time my contract was up and he offered me another year on the same money, so I'd have been on the same money for three years and I turned it down because I thought I deserved a rise and, so I expected to sit down and talk terms with him about a new contract but we never got that far. So as soon as it got towards the end of pre-season when clubs started showing interest, because friendly games start, I went and played a couple of trial games for a couple of clubs looking for a move.
>
> **MR**: When you were training on your own and it was clear to you that you weren't wanted, what did you say to the other players who had been there for some time?
>
> **Player**: It wasn't just me actually, there was about six of us who had turned up and we hadn't got any kit because he'd brought probably half a dozen players in. So I mean we were all disappointed but you don't show that in the dressing room, because everybody's been there and everyone knows what it's like so, you know, it usually gets treated with sort of humour and that. I think I was the only one whose contract was up at that time as well, so some of the other lads were still included in the training and that because they were in the middle of their contracts so he might still need them.

So, in responding to the question of whether these experiences are common for players at this level of football, he said:

> It's a common experience I think. You speak to players and a lot of them, even if they haven't been treated like this, a lot of them have been at clubs where managers have treated players in the same way. I mean it wasn't nasty to me or anything like that, I mean it was just really, like you don't exist. You know, he doesn't say hello to you or anything but when you speak to him he's civil and, I don't know, it's like a cold shoulder.

In summary, this player in interview describes a scenario that he considered common in professional football in which he loses *a status* – that of first team player – within the club which for him was central to his sense of self and identity. He was instantly marginalized from his teammates, some of whom he considered to be second-rate, at a time when he believed he had a meaningful part to play in the team. There may be a number of players within a club who, at any one time, may be isolated by their managers and other members of staff or who at least may be subjected to feelings of isolation, but it is unlikely that they will remain unacknowledged by *all* team members as well. Yet, the idea of the non-person, i.e., as someone who suffers *social* rejection, is significant in terms of the process of transferring insofar as it sheds light on the feelings of rejection that players may experience and exposes the fragile nature of their existence and their identities as players. As soon as they are rejected they begin to reflect on and take stock of their positions relative to their contemporaries. They begin to generate feelings of uncertainty about their futures and if rejection is irrevocable, as in the case of the player who returned to find he was omitted from all aspects of pre-season training, they begin immediately to think in terms of their available options. In an occupational culture such as professional football, in which ones 'human being-ness' is evaluated by ones 'human doing-ness' (Ingham et al, 1999), being denied the right to exercise ones 'doing-ness' for any length of time generates frustration and anxiety. Added to this however is the fact that the person who has the authority to deny a player a position in the first team – the manager of the football club – is the very person with whom that player is at pains to develop and maintain a working relationship. Thus, the sociological significance of the concept

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of the 'non-person' lies in the fact that this *status-position* is more adequately understood as a consequence of changing power-balances between a player and his manager.

'Sad tales'

The sense of rejection and loss experienced by a player when he is dropped in the first instance is 'cushioned' (Friedman, 1990) by him to greater or lesser degrees. The concept of *cushioning* is similar to Goffman's (1952) idea of 'cooling out' *oneself* as adaptation to failure, although it refers more to a continuing set of less severe or crisis-like rejections which are a more regular and institutionalised aspect of an occupation such as professional football. In terms of the process of transferring, a player is better able to *cushion* his self-conception and to adapt to failure at one club for he knows from experience that he – like others before him – will be able to attain a new status, which perhaps differs from the one he lost or failed to gain, but which provides at least something or somebody for him to become. For a player who is moving to a club in a lower division, the alternative status-position presented is a compromise of some kind, providing at least some of the trappings of his lost status.

When a player transfers one club for another he does so because, in the majority of cases, he has been 'rejected' by his manager. Yet at no point in any interview for this study – with the partial exception of one – did a player express the opinion that he was not good enough at that level or that he did not play well enough and did not deserve his place in the team. In most cases, as will be indicated, the players interviewed attempted to rationalise the reasons for their transfer such that, via a combination of adjustment and 'cushioning' (Friedman, 1990), they maintained their sense of self-esteem. In a number of cases, for example, they developed 'sad tales' (see Chapter Two) in order to displace the blame for their rejection away from themselves or to generate 'distance' for themselves from their rejector, thus, saving face. For professional footballers, whose expectations and self-conceptions have been built-up over some time, rejection by a manager is probably the most significant 'cause' of devaluation of self-esteem (provided the player is not so self-obsessed that he cannot perceive the opinions of others).

Using Goffman (1961) as a point of departure, it might be suggested that following times of transition or turning points, such as a process of transferring, a player may develop an image or view of himself which can be orally presented by way of explaining his present circumstances – that is, his rejection – to others: in short, a player will instigate a process of defining the self along defensible lines. In constructing an 'apologia' (Goffman, 1961) of this nature, a player may be selective with, deny, or distort the facts in order to 'distance' himself from responsibility for *his* situation as it stands. The degree of detail of such 'apologias' varies, although from experiences, interactions and observation of others, players voice a number of stock phrases – occupational cultural sayings – in an attempt to cushion and cope with their 'failure'. Typical in this regard are phrases that pertain to '*un*lucky breaks' and '*not* being in the right place at the right time'; in these circumstances the notion of 'luck' is used by way of an excuse (Gowling, 1974). An apologia therefore is a method that players employ in order to explain their position in a way that is, for them, morally appropriate. Thus, to explain the present state of affairs in terms of an 'unlucky break' is a legitimate way of expressing their disappointment concerning the way in which their circumstances unfolded at a particular club.

For players, 'unlucky breaks' do seem to be important factors and contingencies in individual career progress and success, and may be of greater significance in an occupation in which there exists intense competition for scarce places in teams. The notion of *luck as an excuse* however is but one of the apologias identified in this study: for example, when asked about experiences that may have changed his opinion of football, one former professional player, currently playing non-league, said:

> I think probably the hardest thing to understand when you go in [to professional football] is it is *purely about opinion*. Until you can take that on board you're always going to struggle, especially when you are not being picked and you think, 'Well, why aren't I? I should be playing'. And you think, 'Well, hold a minute. What have I done in training? How did I

perform?' And you can see somebody else's point of view. I think that's the hardest thing to take on board.

Associated with the idea that professional football is 'purely about opinion' is the following remark made by a first division player who was asked to recall his thoughts on the types of comments that had been made about his performances. He did not recall any specific point of view, but instead made the following point:

> You certainly take things to heart, like the slightest little comment and you go away thinking, 'What did he [the manager] mean by that?' They said something probably in pure innocence but you go away thinking they meant something else: you would worry about the slightest little thing. Obviously in football there's a lot of '*if your face fits*' and I think there is something in that to an extent. You want people to like you and think you're a good player and a good trainer and things like that a lot of the time.

Former Chelsea midfielder, Eddie Newton, discussed the success he had achieved under former managers, Glenn Hoddle and Ruud Gullit, including four cup winners medals. However Newton remarks on the arrival of Gianluca Vialli in the following way: 'Sometimes your face doesn't fit. Whatever you do, it doesn't matter. I'd been through a lot of managers so I suppose it was inevitable that one of them would not like my face. From day one I knew I wouldn't be in his side' (*The Guardian*, January 7, 2001). Referring to the subjective – and therefore questionable – opinions of others is a convenient strategy for players in order for them to downplay, and divert attention away from having to account for, the level of their performances. In essence, the underlying idea that a player is hoping that significant others will accept is that under a different manager, whose opinion of his skills are more favourable, his *face would fit* and he could experience the benefits of success afforded a first-team regular. Sociologically, then, 'being in the right place at the right time' means being among the 'right' people (see Chapter Seven).

In this respect, a third division player who had formerly played for a team in Division Two said: 'Well, I left [my former club] because me and the manager started *bumping heads* really and it was just time to move on I think'. When asked whether they were 'bumping heads' because the manager was leaving him out of the starting eleven he replied: 'Yes, I mean he was right to do so in some cases but after a while I wasn't prepared to put up with it anymore'. This statement of partial self-blame was the only one of its kind among the interviews conducted for this study although it provides a good example of the way in which a player may distort the events that initiates the transferring process. Other players spoke at greater lengths in terms of accounting for the way in which they came to be transferred. For example, another second division player who had formerly played in Division One reflected upon a number of the decisive moments of his career so far. He said:

> You know we have these major turning points during our careers, injuries and transfers, I think transfers have always been my main turning points. But the way I've always left clubs, it's never been because somebody's come and offered a lot of money for me, and you know you are quite happy to make the move and that. It always seems to be forced upon me somehow. I mean by fall-outs with managers or managers that don't like you, which is obviously not an ideal way to move. And every time it's happened it has been stressful.

The final example involves a former third division player who was signed at the age of twenty from non-league football. The manager who signed him resigned almost immediately and a well-known former international player filled the position. The player said that in time he started to become unhappy at the club, explaining that the manager 'basically didn't think I would be good enough to be a centre-forward and started to play me at centre-half'. Following a three-month period during which the player received treatment for an ankle injury, the manager was sacked and a former player of the same club took up the position. The player returned to training to discover that the new manager, to use his own words, 'didn't rate me either and sent me out on loan to [a non-league team]'. When asked how it felt not to be rated by two managers in quick succession, the player

replied in the following way: 'I was more disappointed with [my first manager in professional football], because he was a hero of mine when he was a player and I thought he might have taken the forwards and worked on us, which he didn't really do'. The player said that he had met his second manager by chance a few years later following a transfer to a club in the Conference league. This second manager told him that his transfer away from the club wasn't anything personal, 'It was just', he said, 'at the time he needed players he could rely on and he couldn't rely on me because of my inexperience'. The player recalled that after the transfer deal had gone through the second manager said to his present manager, 'I don't think he will make it, I don't think he's good enough'. The player concluded his descriptions of the events as follows:

> I think my game developed here a lot more, with [my present manager] and the rest of the players. I felt hurt and I remember writing to [the local paper] about [my second manager], I said, 'he's let me go and I'm going to prove him wrong and I wish him no success at all in the game', which is a bit bitter and twisted, but when you're sort of twenty one or twenty two years of age that's the way you think, and that was it. I saw him years later, and I've got nothing against him, it was a professional thing, and that's what I mean about football. Football is purely about opinion. There are people sometimes you like and dislike and it's not personal, it's a professional basis. If you can rely on them you'll have them: if you can't, you don't want them.

The last example presented adds to the strategies identified so far, for the comments expressed by the player above illustrate the manner in which he responds to threats to his self-conception. In short, the strategy he employs is to *deny* the opinions of his ability as expressed by his former managers – a self-preserving 'rejection of one's rejectors' (Goffman, 1961). Thus, in order to cushion himself from experiences of rejection, and to adapt and defend the notion that he is worth something to somebody – an idea that he has been built into his identity over time – a player may distort or deny the truth concerning the way in which he came to be transferred, or he may reject the opinions of his rejector(s), usually his manager. Consequently, the behaviour of a player may be understood

more adequately in terms of the way he assists in a process of 'cooling out' in relation to his own failure.

Conclusion

It would seem safe to conclude at this point that relationships between a manager and his players are potentially adversarial for a player validates his sense of self and identity by playing and contributing to the performance of the team whereas the identity of a manager is maintained by winning games. Thus, for players, the opportunity to play in games and achieve personal success may be more important than the overall success of the team (which may be composed of players who are there by virtue of failure and others who are there by virtue of success). This chapter has examined more closely the process of transferring and, in a modest way, contributed to an understanding of the fundamental ways in which professional footballers experience transformations of identity: that is, those socially patterned transformations that relate to, what in other occupations might be understood in terms of, 'promotion' and 'demotion'.

Players have few doubts about *big* moves since for many such transfers are what they have dreamed of achieving. Any anxieties they may harbour in this regard are outweighed by the challenge and the enhancement to self that accompany transfers of this nature. Players who experience a period of rejection prior to their transfer may have a more difficult period of identity-transformation. Yet in many cases they are able to cushion and adjust their self-conceptions to varying degrees of success through a combination of distorting or denying the truth or by rejecting the opinions of their rejectors, for many players recognise the subjective nature of team selection. Thus, a player is able to develop a *self-supporting* 'sad tale' concerning the circumstances in which he came to be transferred in order to cushion or provide relief from the harsh realities associated with achieving career success in a professional sport in which regular and assured positions in teams are a scare resource.

Throughout this chapter, individual players have tended to be treated in isolation, sociologically speaking. While the transformations of 'self' are socially patterned,

the focus has been on the individual player in the main to the neglect of his relationships to others. A sense of rejection, or feelings of isolation, both of which are experienced subjectively, and transformations of identity more generally, are the outcome of interaction with others. With this thought in mind, one of the objects of Chapter Seven is to examine the people to whom players turn for advice and support when, for example, they have been dropped from the starting line-up or when they are deliberating over transfer offers.

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[1] For Gowling (1974) a big move related to the movement of a player to a club in a higher division. A number of players however referred to certain clubs that they considered 'big', some of which were in the same division as the club for which they were currently playing.

[2] For a fuller, sociological discussion of the idea of failure and rejection in sport, see Ball (1976) 'Failure in Sport'.

[3] See Chapter Eight for a fuller discussion of the transfer system.

[4] See Chapter Six and the Appendices.

Chapter Seven

Transfer markets and informal grapevines.

The objects of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, the intention is to explain how, among their work colleagues, players develop informal networks of friends. These *friendship* networks exist alongside the networks that players are bound up in by virtue of their employment, which include all work colleagues with most of whom they will eventually lose direct contact. However, within their work networks, players develop relations that may be quite emotional – over time players make both enemies and friends. The high levels of competitive pressure for the limited places available in the first eleven can lead to rivalries, and sometimes even conflict, among 'team mates'. By contrast, friendship networks are comprised of people 'inside' the game, to whom players turn during times of uncertainty and who will offer support. The second object is to understand the way in which friendship networks can facilitate the process of transferring. Networks of this kind are useful for making new associations. This examination will attempt to look more closely at the mechanics of the process of transferring in terms of the general patterns of who speaks to whom, where and when.

Since it is the case that the identity of a player – as a *non-person*, a *reject* or maybe as a *superstar* – is gained via interaction with others (see Chapter Six), the sociological problem which lies at the heart of this chapter relates to an understanding of the social relations of support systems for players. The idea is not to treat players in isolation, but to look at professional footballers – as *homines aperti* (Elias, 1978) – such that their identities stem from the nature of their relationships among people 'inside' the game. Thus, the questions addressed concern whether players receive support from others in their team and the nature of this support. Who do they talk to when they are dropped from the starting line up? When do players know about potential transfers and who tells them? An important point of this chapter, therefore, will be to gain an understanding of the patterns of informal or unofficial lines of communication among players, coaches, player agents, as so on, as they relate to the process of transferring.

The development of friendship networks

The interview data for this study indicate that most first team players do not discuss their team selection circumstances with other players in *their* team. If they have not been selected to start in the first eleven for a forthcoming match, or if they are unsettled by their current situation and are reviewing their options, players *tend* to keep their opinions about their own state of affairs to themselves, particularly within the football club. The flip side of this scenario is that players do not enquire about the inner thoughts of those who are omitted from the first team, nor do they think it is their place to ask such questions in 'public' settings – what might be referred to as 'gossip centres' (Tebbutt and Marchington, 1997) – such as the changing rooms. Most concern themselves with keeping safe their own position in the team. There are exceptions to this rule, however, some of which will be examined in the course of this chapter. Notwithstanding the initial comment about the reluctance of players to openly *display* their reactions to issues of selection, it would be naïve to suggest that players do not talk about their performances, or the performances of others, or about matches in general, for talking points of this type are debated continually. Yet, there is a distinction on the whole between, on the one hand, the discussions among squad members that relate to individual performances in matches and in training and of transfer gossip in general, and, on the other, the way in which a player may personally deliberate over future career developments. These points could be included in Chapter Three concerning occupational culture, for the 'attitude' that underpins the approach of players to the plight of others may be summarised in the following way: as one player put it, 'think about yourself first, and worry about the rest later'[1].

So, while it is the case that some players seek out the opinions of others concerning their performance in a game, they are far less likely to examine their anxieties and the pros and cons of potential transfers with other squad members with whom there exists internal rivalry. Thus, it might be argued that solidarity among, and support systems for, players within the club – the type of which may exist informally for employees in other occupations (Collinson, 2000) – is undermined by ruthless competition for places. For example, one former

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Premiership player spoke of his experiences of rivalry among players in the following way. He said, 'despite the fact that me and you might have to be friendly on the field and off the field, if we're playing for the same position I'll do my utmost to make sure I'm the first person. So, as I always say, you don't have many friends in football, but you have a lot of acquaintances'. Similarly, Magee (1998) notes that players coming from leagues outside England find it difficult to get 'real' friends. He quotes Danish international, Claus Thomsen, who remarks that, 'you can't really be close to anyone because you are not quite sure that they are friends ... it's very difficult to get very close friends in football' (p.129).

Regardless of the high levels of competition, and the underpinning emphasis on individualism, friendships do develop, particularly if players have *come through* the youth ranks together. Alan Gowling (1974), for example, demonstrates that among a squad of players, particular friendships develop that are likely to be structured either in terms of age, playing experience, length of time at the club or with previous clubs, or even travel circumstances to and from the training ground. With regard to this latter example, Garry Nelson (1995) discussed his membership of the 'Gatwick Express' when referring to the three players with whom he travelled from their meeting point in Sussex to the training ground in Charlton. Also Parker (1996) discusses the age-related friendship 'cliques' that were formed by the apprentices in his study of the youth training scheme. Back *et al* (2001) examine the development of social networks among black Afro-Caribbean players who, it is suggested, 'stick together' and don't easily 'mix' or 'fit in' (p.151). In their study they suggest that such perceptions held among players more generally are reinforced to some extant by the development of black friendship networks within the community of professional players. In this respect, Back *et al* (2001) make the following point: 'Friendship groups which are white, black or mixtures of black and white players pervade the dressing rooms of clubs up and down the country but are rarely discussed in public or considered as problematic unless they are exclusively made up of black or foreign members. Indeed the creation of supportive communities of players from ethnic minority backgrounds might be more readily understood than the alternative formulations in the context of the difficulties encountered by black players over the years' (p.151).

At this point therefore one may put forward the argument that individual players may be more willing to disclose their uncertainties and fears among a group such as this than they would in the context of the club dressing room[2]. In addition, it is in these 'close' contexts where players feel able, and are more likely, to involve themselves with the circumstances and feelings of others. In order to examine this hypothesis, the following examples are included to demonstrate the types of people with whom a player may talk about personal issues. For instance, one young first division player spoke of the relationship he developed with another player with whom he had been friendly since their days together as apprentices. They grew up in the same area and sometimes travelled home together at weekends. This player described a situation in which he was uncertain about his present position at the club. When asked whether he had discussed his dilemma with other players, he said: 'No not really, I've always been mates with [a friend at the club], but he was like golden boy. It's hard to give somebody advice if you're not experiencing the situation yourself and anyway, everything had been rosy for him, he was flavour of the month, so he could only talk to me about experiences he'd had himself. He'd never been in a situation like that … being stuck, not knowing what to do'. The response offered is unhelpful in this specific situation, yet the player felt he could express his anxieties about his dilemma to his friend. The particular pattern highlighted in this example is determined to some degree by age and a sense of shared experience. Both players lived through the trials and tribulations of youth team football and observed the release of many other apprentices of their age. This common history may help to solidify their relationship, enabling them to remain 'friends' rather than merely 'acquaintances'.

Another former young professional, who, at the time of writing was playing semi-professionally, also mentioned the people among whom he discussed the problems of being a 'pro'. When asked whether he discussed the realities of what it is like to be a professional footballer he said:

> I don't think I ever really talked to my Mum and Dad about it because I never really saw them to be honest … probably the people you talk to the most is like your roommate that you share with. Although you have the whole team there, there's obviously four or five people that you really get

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on well with. You talk to them about it; just certain things and they bounce things off you. Like, 'I haven't been in the reserves for three weeks. What do you reckon?' And you'd just say, 'it's part and parcel of the game. It could happen to me'.

For young professionals, their ability to provide immediate support for each other will alter rapidly as soon as a number of players are released, or one of them transfers away from the club. Traditionally, few apprentices are offered professional contracts (see Parker, 1996) and those who sign new terms may be drawn closer as a consequence of their collective experience. Those who are released and who are offered contracts elsewhere, must find new people whom they can trust or contact friends, who may be former colleagues, at other clubs.

Another first division player, in this connection, spoke of a small group of people 'within the game', but not at his present club, to whom he turned when he had previously been uncertain about what his next move might be. The network described by this player includes players from former clubs with whom he had developed a close relationship – in a similar manner to the players referred to above. On this occasion the members of his 'network' responded in the following, and in his opinion, unhelpful way: 'I was anxious, even when I was speaking to people, you know, players whose opinion I valued, they'd say: "You'll be all right son, oh don't worry you'll be all right, you'll definitely get a club no problem". But I was thinking "well, yes I should get a club", but you're still twitching a little bit, a bit nervy'. As players get older and move from one club to the next they meet other people 'inside the game' with whom they develop friendships who provide support in the form of advice or words of comfort. Over time, players build up a network of people in whom they can place their trust: a network that may include current and former playing colleagues, player agents, former managers and coaches. These networks may be spread across a number of leagues and in addition may assist an unsettled player for, as player agent Bill McMurdo has pointed out: 'Players recommend other players to managers informally all the time' (*The Guardian*, 22/01/00). So, players develop relationships with a number of significant 'insiders' in whom they can confide their personal thoughts. This network will also facilitate a process of transferring upon which a player may

embark. In this connection, the importance for players of these informal, interconnected relationships will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

Players may express their thoughts to their wives or partners more openly – a point dealt with later in this study – but in the context of the 'gossip centres' *within* the football club, such as the changing rooms, the physiotherapy room, the training ground, and so on, there is a tendency for players to react to disappointment, upsets and uncertainties with humour (Collinson, 1988). For example, the former first division player quoted in the previous chapter, who was ignored and treated as a non-person by his manager, made the following point – which is worth repeating at this juncture – with regard to the presentation of self. He said, 'we were all disappointed *but you don't show that in the dressing room*, because everybody's been there and everyone knows what it's like so, you know, it usually gets treated with sort of humour and that'. Similarly, humour was used by players to deal with other potentially difficult situations. For instance, a former Premiership player referred to the fact that players at his club considered a second change of manager in quick succession as both comical and farcical. He said, 'it became almost a standing joke. The lads would laugh about it, but people were worried. At the backs of their minds, it's a subconscious thing, no one is happy with the situation'. A player agent interviewed for this study commented on the ups and downs experienced by players by suggesting that, while humour was an important aspect of dressing room banter, 'they have to be macho because the persona of all players is that they have this *hard front*'. In the light of the requirement for humour as one means by which players may save face and maintain a 'hard front' (Collinson, 1988), the problem of the social relations of player support systems might be explainable, in part, if one considers it in the following manner.

When players are faced with personal disappointment and uncertainty they must manage the impressions that significant others receive (Goffman, 1959). In the company of their team-mates, players, in accordance with their masculine occupational culture, are expected not to complain but to laugh along with the group banter, which may be directed at them, and to be seen to work enthusiastically to regain their former status[3]. In other words, in 'frontstage

regions' (Goffman, 1959), workplace humour of this kind may assist players in appearing to accept what for them is a fearful situation, whilst avoiding their surrender of self among team-mates, enabling them to maintain a 'hard front'. 'Backstage', however, players will be anxious and may feel as though they have failed. Players observe other teammates being dropped from the team from the first moment they sign a full-time contract and it is from this instant that they begin to learn informally the occupationally 'acceptable' ways in which to react. The process of informal socialisation for young players centrally involves learning to deal with the fears and uncertainties associated with their work – particularly in terms of 'presentation of self'. They must learn also how to react appropriately to players who are dropped or face outright rejection. In time, there is, in a sense, nothing new to learn as such for they see regularly the transition of other players who experience periods of rejection, some of whom leave in search of first team football elsewhere.

Informal practices and transferring

The significance of the above discussion is that player support systems are characteristically informal and often involve former work colleagues who now play for, or are connected in some manner with, other clubs. Players are more likely to discuss their circumstances or personal unhappiness among people who belong to their developing friendship networks. Friendship networks are useful for players insofar as they enable them to make contacts with other 'insiders' some of whom may have extensive webs of contacts. Thus, in terms of the process of transferring, mediators between two networks that are only weakly connected are often indispensable links in the chain of information regarding available players.

The majority of transfers are organised using a mixture of formal and informal procedures. For instance, the procedure of 'tapping' – 'illegally' contacting a player with a view to signing them – would be one example of an informal or unofficial practice. The informal, and in some instances illegal, practices that are identified in this chapter are underpinned by the networks of contacts which players develop throughout their careers. These contacts, as suggested above, may

include former playing colleagues, agents, and coaches and managers under and/or with whom the player may have played.

It is an established sociological point that organisations are constituted by the interplay between official and unofficial practices of participants (Watson, 1995). The industrial relations literature, for example, indicates that an informal structure of social relations inevitably emerges alongside the formal one in work places (Auster, 1996). Even those practices that are 'against the rules' or are *illegal* are often seen sociologically as integral to the daily social organisation of work. Thus, practices that break rules are not always abnormal nor do they necessarily constitute a threat to the interests of those people who are bound up with workplace activities. Deviations from official procedures tend to alter the focus of behaviour for individuals such that the informal patterns buttress the formal. Some deviations from the formal system may be so commonplace that 'unwritten laws' and informal associations are established (Watson, 1995).

There is a great deal of excellent sociological research concerning the networks developed instrumentally by employees in particular occupations. For example, in his study of the occupation of boxers, Wacquant (1998) examines the job descriptions of boxing matchmakers, who he refers to as 'fleshpeddlers' (p.1). Of importance for matchmakers, according to Wacquant (1998), is their nexus of personal contacts through which information about the boxing scene and particular boxers flow. The focus for both Faulkner (1971) and Blair (2001) concerns people involved in the entertainment business, many of whom are on short-term fixed contracts. Faulkner (1971) suggests that the kind of career which a musician will have mainly depends on their ability and willingness to fit in to an existing network of informal relationships among performers, composers, conductors and the hiring contactors. In her piece entitled, 'You're Only as Good as Your Last Job', Blair (2001) argues similarly that those people working in the British film industry, as well as those attempting to gain access to it, hear of and secure work through a variety of types of personal contact who provide recommendations. Blair suggests that an employer would, rightly or wrongly, view a recommended person as presenting lower risk than a completely unknown individual. Saxenian (1996) interviewed employees working for computer firms in

Silicon Valley, California and suggests that the networks developed by employees working in these firms serve as efficient job search networks and make shift recruitment centres. One engineer interviewed for this study made the following comment about the employment prospects of others: 'You don't just hire people out of the blue. In general, it's people you know, or you know someone who knows them' (p.27). What is true of workplaces more generally also applies to the work practices in professional football, particularly in relation to the process of transferring.

In professional football, managers and club chairmen may have in mind players whose contracts they want to renew and extend and those whose contracts they intend to terminate. They may have some idea of the players they want to sign from other clubs, perhaps for a fee, in order to strengthen their chances of success. Formal procedures exist by which club administrators are formally required to abide when signing players, whether they are dealing with existing club players or others who currently play for other clubs. Yet, the interview data obtained for this study indicate that the 'real work' related to signing players and the process of transferring happens *despite* the formal procedures. The object of this section then is to examine the informal networks that players form over time that may be used to initiate and subsequently facilitate the process of transferring and to cut through the formal procedures.

Sociologists interested in the social organisation of work have for some time examined the issue of conflict (and the forms that conflict may take) between employers and managers and their employees, as well as conflict among employees. The problems of employee subordination and the various forms of 'resistance' to that subordination are common themes and have been the focus of scrutiny (Collinson, 2000). Whilst remaining cautious not to over generalise, most studies have been concerned with identifying 'oppositional' practices and the development of a counter-culture by employees which involves informal – sometimes illegal – procedures that are intended to win back for them a greater measure of control over their work (Collinson, 2000). In part, this resistance involves a degree of 'defence of self' (Watson, 1995). Other studies have examined the unofficial practices of managers. A number of these studies, for

example the classic research undertaken by Gouldner (1954), illustrate how unofficial rule-breaking may in fact help meet the ends that those rules were originally intended to serve. Yet, attempting to interpret the informal practices identified in professional football solely as forms of resistance to the power exerted by managers would be a mistake in the light of the interview data collected for this study.

It would be inaccurate to interpret informal practices solely as oppositional in nature as many of the unofficial associations are experienced as co-operative rather than a source of conflict. The same transfer deal may have positive consequences for some people bound up in the move and concurrently it may have negative spin-offs for others. So, the networks of relationships that develop may not only be useful for players but for other network members as well, including management. For example, a network of contacts may be beneficial for player agents in order for *their* players to move regularly, although they don't want players to feel constantly unsettled. The value of a player may drop if he doesn't exhibit a level of 'stickability' and he – and his agent – may gain the reputation of being troublemakers. The informal networks or grapevines may be useful for club managers too. For example, they may employ the practice of 'tapping' players – or their agents – who may be unsettled or are close to the end of their contracts. Managers may also fall back on their networks in order to acquire players on a temporary or permanent basis; for instance, if their squad is weakened by injury. As managers move from club to club they develop co-operative associations with former players, some of whom in time become managers and coaches, from whom they can request assistance. All players and managers develop, and are members of, informal networks. So a player who uses a contact to initiate a move may benefit directly or indirectly from the associations developed *within the game* by that contact. The following examples indicate the ways in which the majority of players and coaches working in professional football secure work for themselves, at some stage in their career, through a variety of personal contacts who perform functions such as providing recommendations.

In his doctoral thesis, Magee (1998) highlights the principal ways in which transfers can be initiated – what he terms the 'points of recruitment' (p.100) –

namely, 'tapping', scouting, agents, advisors, sponsors and the grapevine. He refers initially to a 'tapping' system, which is a system that can be defined, in short, as 'illegal' communication[4]. Managers and coaches contact players, and in some instances player agents, informally with the intention of discovering whether or not a player would consider transferring to their club. Magee suggests that ' "tapping" is a common practice that most clubs follow'. A player agent interviewed for this study expressed a similar point of view. When asked how transfers are initiated the agent responded in the following way: 'What they [the clubs] are supposed to do is to contact the club [with whom the player is contracted]. Invariably they contact the agent to ask whether the player would be interested'. There have been a number of accusations of 'illegal transfer activities', principally tapping, referred to in the national press. For example, former Manchester United and Dutch international, Jaap Stam, stated that he was 'tapped up' by the Manchester United manager, Sir Alex Ferguson. Stam acknowledged that the *illegal*, and therefore, 'highly dangerous' get-togethers have become an 'accepted part of the game' (*The Mirror*, 13/8/2001). In his autobiographical diary, Eamon Dunphy refers to an illegal phone call he received from a former playing colleague, Theo Foley, who was keen to sign him, but wanted to be sure that he hadn't 'lost interest in the game'. Dunphy mentions this illegal contact as follows: 'I was sitting at home this evening when the phone went. It was Theo Foley, the Charlton manager, and an old team-mate from the Irish team. He was at the Hilton at a boxing dinner. "What is the problem at Millwall?" I told him that I wanted to get away' (Dunphy, 1987).

This informal *testing of the water* extends not only to players but also to the recruitment of other personnel employed as a football-related member of the club. For example, one physiotherapist[5], describing how he moved from a Third Division club to a Premier League club, explained that after one year at the smaller club he had 'one of the classic phone calls that you get in professional football, which was: "We have not had this conversation, but if our physiotherapist leaves at the end of this season, would you be interested in working for us?" '. Another physiotherapist explained how he moved from a Third Division to a First Division club: 'The manager [of the First Division club]

just rang me and said "I fancy a change" [of physiotherapist] ... it was totally illegal'.

A number of players referred to 'classic' phone calls similar to the ones described above. For instance, one young First Division player, who had not at that point established himself as a first team regular, described the period in which he was deciding where his future lay. The following interview extract concerns the period during which he was contacted by a former coach who had recommended him to other managers:

> **Player**: I didn't think I was going to have a chance at the first team, I had nothing else lined up, [a former coach] was assistant to [my former manager] and when he left the club he phoned me up and said, 'look, I've got these clubs sorted out for you. Don't sign your contract. I can get you here, get you there'.
>
> **MR**: Are players contacted like this normally?
>
> **Player**: Yeah, it quite often goes on.

Another First Division player referred to the fact that he had been 'tapped' by several clubs during his first season as a professional. When asked to explain how he came to sign his first contract he made the following remarks:

> **Player**: The day after we played at Wembley, he [the manager] just pulled us all in for contract talks. There were a few of the younger pros and you just went in and did a bit of haggling to see what you get out of him, but I'd had a few other clubs that had been in contact with me during the year. One of the [Premier League club] coaches phoned me and said they would sort me out, but I was very happy where I was. So, I was confident that if I didn't get a contract there I would get one at another club.
>
> **MR**: So you are saying that other clubs were suggesting that if you didn't get offered what you wanted then they would sort you out.
>
> **Player**: Yes, they said if you don't get anything sorted there, then they would have me. I think it was really because I was new on the scene, I was a youngish lad and I was doing well and I'd just come out of University. A

lot of people didn't know about me, so I think a few clubs perked up interest and a lot of them came on the market.

Contacts generally serve the function of either directly offering a job opportunity, informing a player of a potential job opportunity, or recommending a player to a third party. In this connection, having a person who can recommend the *attitude* and abilities of a player is important. Younger players, who may be peripheral members of the squad, are subject to greater uncertainty and longer spells out of the manager's first eleven. Their contact networks tend to be limited, comparatively speaking, for they will not have had the opportunities to gain, and to build on, a favourable reputation among their peers in terms of their individual qualities or their commitment to their work. Thus, friends and ex-colleagues – the network of contacts – remain influential for established players throughout their careers for they are the people in a position to comment on the quality of an individual player's work, and in time become one of the dominant forms of contact used to secure employment. Blair (2003) identifies similar forms of contacts in her study of networks of interdependence in the UK film industry.

Magee (1998) highlights 'the grapevine' as a central 'point of recruitment' in professional football and, in this regard, he suggests that: 'Football is often described as a "who-you-know" sport' (p.100). However in his discussion he examines each 'point of recruitment' separately: he does not tell us whether there is any overlap between them. Furthermore, he does not shed light on whether the initial contacts made *through the grapevine*, whether by a player agent or a former playing colleague, are legal or illegal in terms of FIFA regulations. It is certainly the case that managers tend to view a recommended player as presenting a lower risk than one who is completely unknown or lesser known (see McGovern, 2000; 2002). Leverage in the labour market for players is strongly affected by pre-existing relationships with others in the 'industry'. But Magee's tendency to discuss the 'points of recruitment' separately and as distinct elements in the transferring process is not supported by the data collected for this study, for official and unofficial procedures are often bound up in the same transfer. For example, many players are 'tapped' via a contact, who may be a former playing

colleague or an agent (who may also be a former playing colleague), who is a part of 'the grapevine', as has been illustrated above.

Availability and time

Of course there are *legal* types of contact made constantly between managers and players (or approaches to players by club scouts), which are sanctioned by the clubs with whom the player is contracted; unless, that is, the player is out of contract[6]. In these instances, prior knowledge of the player by the manager, or receiving a recommendation from a contact, is still important in terms of recruitment. A number of players interviewed for this study explained how managers for whom they had previously been young professionals had recruited them. For example, when asked how his transfer came about, one former Premier League player responded in the following way: 'It was completely out of the blue. The Premier League didn't start 'till a week later so I'd done my pre-season and played the first game with [my former club]. [The Premier league club] were up in Scotland on a pre-season tour and they played Hearts or someone and got stuffed. So [the former manager] got in touch completely out of the blue and said, "look we're desperate for a centre-half. Come up and talk". I went up and signed that day'. Another former Premier League player described a very similar scenario. He said: '[My former manager] became manager of [a Second Division club]. He phoned me up at about ten o'clock at night. I was in my house. He said, "Would you want to play for me again?" I said "Yes, definitely". He said, "Get in the car tomorrow, you're coming up". So I was signed the next day. It was unbelievable'. Both the moves described above had been timely for the players involved in that managerial changes were afoot at their present clubs. Further, for the players and managers involved, these kinds of transfers represent a reduced risk for they are not negotiating with completely unknown individuals[7]. Consequently any uncertainties which could be generated during these indeterminate times in players' careers may be dispelled to some degree.

The next example involves a former non-league player who had known his future manager only for a relatively short period of time. The player explained how he was offered an opportunity to play in the Football League:

I was playing non-league football at the time and this guy came down and he was playing in the same team as me. He played for probably two or three months and he was between jobs. He'd just finished at [a Third Division club] as manager and he was looking at getting back into management and [another Third Division club] took him on. And he phoned me back after he left and asked if I'd be interested in taking a pro contract and seeing how I got on ... I came down and had a few trial games and he offered me a professional contract which was basically peanuts, but it gave me a crack at the pro game.

Unlike the other players in the previous examples who were contacted by managers for whom they formerly played, this player was contacted by a former playing colleague – albeit at a non-league club – who went on to become a manager. The point demonstrated by this example is that while connections may be comparatively weak, and may arise for players unexpectedly, they may still prove to be crucial in terms of opportunities for employment at professional football clubs. Yet there are other, arguably indirect, forms of contact that may be a means by which a player is offered an opportunity to transfer, such as a recommendation through a third party.

For example, a former Premier League player, whose contract had only two weeks to run, was becoming increasingly desperate to find a club during the 1997 close season. Despite the efforts of his agent – with whom he was losing faith – he eventually asked his solicitor to fax the clubs with whom he had formerly undertaken some work. After months of uncertainty, which were made more worrying by the birth of his first child, he spoke to a First Division club via a contact of his solicitor. There may be a number of other patterns in terms of the way in which a player or manager initiates a process of transferring. Crucially, however, all the examples provided, which are representative of those described by the interviewees for this study, demonstrate the importance of the development of a network of contacts for professional footballers, even if the player is not *deliberately* – perhaps instrumentally – attempting to cultivate such ties. The significance of the relational patterns illustrated in these examples cannot be

overstated for they are central in terms of the work opportunities available to players throughout their careers. Playing contracts can be short, relatively speaking, and most players have to re-secure their positions or find new clubs on a regular basis. A high level of interdependence exists among players for they work in close (and 'closed') environments and the constraint to maintain and develop good reputations as reliable professionals among colleagues is experienced on an ongoing basis. The relatively high level of interconnectedness of professional football, an industry in which personnel move from club to club on a relatively regular basis, may be demonstrated further in the following example. This involves an experienced First Division player who was reunited with a former manager with whom he had previously experienced some difficulties:

> I came back off my honeymoon and the fella who'd made me train on my own at [a former club] had taken over as the manager. So, I was thinking that I was ready to move on again, because of the way he treated me the time before. I'd met him in the meantime and sort of spoke to him and had been civil to him. I always had a feeling that I would come across him again and so at the start of the season, once again, he's brought a couple of centre halves with him so I was expecting not to be included. But as it was I played and played very well.

An understanding of time should be allied to an appreciation of the social relations of transferring. Without overstating this point, the opportunity for a player to move from one club to another may also be contingent on a number of time-related factors, not least of which is the moment when a manager decides he needs another player. *Available* candidates are reviewed and a manager may decide upon a player who possesses the skills and abilities he requires. Players who are looking to transfer must hope that their availability coincides with the point at which the manager begins his search for a replacement. The player who is selected by the manager as possessing the relevant talents may, or may not, want to move, for he may have alternative options. Thus, certain players may be identified as second or third choices, although they may not know that they are likely targets. An agent interviewed for this study made the following remarks in this connection: 'Your player [i.e., the player of the agent] may not be a manager's first choice. He may

be his second or third. It may well be that an agent can push a player on a Monday, but the club has someone else in mind at that time. That player [the manager's first choice] may decide not to sign, so by the end of the week, all of a sudden, the manager is looking to his other choices. So the circumstances can change in a day'. Thus, opportunities for players to transfer may arise unexpectedly. In Chapter Six the views of a number of players were that, among management, it is necessary for your 'face to fit', and players must cope with the simple reality that certain managers have a tendency to sign particular types of players[8]. In terms of the process of transferring, it is not only necessary to be identified as someone who possesses a 'good attitude'; it is also necessary to be available at the right time.

The last example of a player transfer in this section is the only one of its kind revealed by the players interviewed for this study. Its inclusion in this chapter is merited insofar as it represents a situation that, although probably uncommon, is significant because it involves the close collaboration between two club chairmen as well as a 'tip-off' involving a former playing colleague. The transfer concerns an experienced Second Division player who received a phone call from a former playing colleague and friend, who is now a coach, who said, 'our manager fancies you. You're coming to us [a First Division club] next season, mate'. The player said that the transfer deal had been arranged between the respective chairmen *without* him – or anyone other than the deal makers – knowing anything about it. He was happy to move because it was a club in a higher league which he considered to be ambitious, and he would be better off financially. He elaborated on the transfer and commented on whether he thought these types of deals were common in the professional game in the following way:

> I really don't know if it is common. I really don't know. It was signed behind my back. It was unreal. I played the rest of the season and people were saying to me, I mean fans were coming up to me and saying, 'we've heard you're going to [a First Division club] next season', and I'd say, 'No I'm not. I haven't got a clue, and all that'. So, June time I got this phone call from the Chief Executive at [the First Division club] and he said if you want to sign for us come and talk to us tomorrow, and so I said 'yes'

and so we spoke terms the next day. But [my present Second Division club] owed me money, twenty grand. So, anyway, I agreed to sign for [the First Division club] that day. So I went back to [my club] and they said, 'Sorry, we're not going to give you your twenty grand' and I said, 'Why? The Chief Executive said, 'Well, you're going to get a good deal at [the First Division club]'. I said, 'Right the deal's off. The deal's off unless I get my twenty grand'. So, I just got home that night and they never knew that I knew about the contract. It was already signed between the two chairmen ... So then an hour later at home the Chief Executive phoned me up and said, 'What will it take for you to sign your contract?' I said, 'Just give me the money that is owed to me'. He went, 'all right then, done'. They were prepared not to give me my money. They were trying to play it along and keep the money for themselves.

Conclusion

Throughout their careers, the rewards available to professional footballers are in short supply for all but the most elite players. This fact brings to light, sociologically speaking, a basic paradox for managers of the organisation of football squads; namely, that those who are officially intended to work co-operatively and to achieve specific, management defined ends, may find themselves in conflict, or direct competition, with each other. In these circumstances, the uncertainties and competitive pressures for places in the first eleven – pressure experienced by all but the most secure players – are central for understanding the informal lines of communication among players, managers, coaches and agents. Over time, players develop 'informal' networks of significant insiders in whom they can place their trust. As a general rule they tend not to confide in current team mates with whom there may be internal rivalries. These contact (or friendship) networks are also highly significant in relation to the process of transferring.

Transfers are organised using a mixture of official and unofficial procedures. It is too simplistic to suggest, as is often asserted, that the practices of player agents undermine the efficiency of the transfer system. Players, agents and managers,

who all may have interests at stake in the same transfer deal, must adhere to official practices, at least publicly. Unofficial and sometimes *illegal* action may in some cases help to meet the interests (for players, managers and club directors) that those rules were originally intended to serve.

There are complex permutations of movement between football clubs by players, managers and coaches. Access to, and movement within, professional football clubs, is strongly influenced by connections developed within the industry, even if those associations are not fostered with this specific intention in mind. Friends 'within' the game prove to be important mediators of opportunities to move, and the importance of such friendship networks continues throughout the career of a player; they are, then, highly significant in relation to labour mobility. Ex-colleagues, for instance, become important as players become established as first team regulars for securing work through activities such as offering jobs directly, recommending individuals via a third party or providing information.

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[1] See Chapter Three, section on 'individual progress versus team success'.

[2] Although this point wasn't really borne out in the interview data.

[3] Likewise, players should not be overly self-congratulatory about their successes among teammates.

[4] That is, 'illegal' in terms of FIFA regulations.

[5] Please see the report on managing injuries in professional football prepared for the PFA (Waddington *et al*, 1999).

[6] See Chapter Eight for an explanation of the 1995 Bosman Ruling.

[7] Some players indicated that when they first arrived at the club they thought they were considered to be the managers favourite by the other players who may not have been purchased by that particular manager.

[8] As discussed in Chapter Two, regional preference may reflect a process that Kanter (1977, p.48) terms homosocial reproduction. Kanter argues that managers who work in situations where performance cannot be prescribed with any confidence are inclined to recruit employees who are socially similar. They do so because they believe they know how employees will behave. Such risk-averse behaviour fosters social homogeneity, as managers tend to reproduce themselves in their own image.

Chapter Eight

Control and the Process of Transferring

Among the portrayals of contemporary professional football there exists a widespread perception that modern players earn vast amounts of money and, with the assistance of 'influential' player agents, are able to dictate to club managers and directors in terms of salaries, length of contracts and other conditions of employment. There has been an increasing focus on the issue of 'player power' in print media since the landmark 1963 Eastham case, but particularly since the formation of the English Premier League and most notably, perhaps, the 1995 Bosman ruling. For example, Nick Townsend (*The Independent*, November 11, 1998) suggests that 'the scales of influence have swung significantly away from the clubs to the players. Once regarded almost like serfs of feudal landlords, they [the players] now have clout like never before'. There are numerous other articles in which managers and chairmen refer to 'player power' and the 'declining importance of contractual obligations' (see, for example, Greenfield, S & Osborn, G., 2000; *The Guardian*, December 12, 2000). But are players (and their agents) able to wield such control over clubs in terms of the process of transferring, as is commonly suggested?

In his doctoral thesis, John Magee (1998) suggests that 'there are certain players whose talent is sought after and they can subsequently control the system. Such players can be termed "the exploiter" ' (p.115). By contrast there are players who have few choices and, according to Magee, 'are not in a position to determine their future. These players can be referred to as "the exploited" ' (p.116). If one imagines, as Magee does, that these ideal types – the 'exploiter' and the 'exploited' – are positioned at the extremes of a continuum, then players who are labelled 'the marketable' occupy middle positions. The 'marketable' are players who are viewed as club 'assets' (p.116), who have a market value which club managers and directors may be able to 'exploit' for their own interests if an appropriate situation arises. Marketable players may be sold, for example, in order to generate capital and to relieve financial pressure. It is clear that these three ideal

types of players must be considered in relational terms for players are never in, or out of, full control – in other words it is always a question of power balances – and, over time, their position on this continuum will change, for example, as they grow older and/or suffer injuries, and as opinions of their playing performances alter.

Magee's initial discussion of the levels of control that players are able to wield, in terms of the *direction* of their careers and specifically in relation to the process of transferring, raises many sociological questions which he does not address concerning the concept of 'control'[1]. Thus, one may legitimately ask over whom or what do 'the exploiters' have control? For one can only have a degree of control over the actions and intentions of oneself and others. Who is controlling 'the exploited'? Are players who find themselves in relatively weak positions, being 'used' by managers, or player agents, or club directors – or a combination of all three – who may be furthering their own interests? In what ways are players able to *resist* the attempts of others to control the direction of their careers? Do 'marketable' players have a choice when their club directors are attempting to sell them in order to raise capital? Can a deal between football clubs be agreed upon lawfully without the consent of the player? Moreover, to what degree do the wives and partners of players have veto powers when it comes to decisions concerning, for example, whether or not to accept a transfer offer that involves geographical relocation for them and their family? What is the nature of the input provided by the club doctors who perform medical examinations prior to players signing their contracts? And finally, although these questions are by no means exhaustive, are issues of control in part dependent on the orientations of players to their work as professional footballers? Does it matter whether players consider themselves to be working 'off' their occupation as footballers rather than working 'for' football, in the sense that Weber (1965) uses these terms[2]? In other words, do players' perceptions of their ability to control their next transfer depend on whether, on balance, they view their work solely as a means by which to make ends meet, or as a way in which they can fulfil their dreams and achieve occupational goals?

In short then, the sociological problem that lies at the heart of this chapter concerns the social relations of control which contour the job mobility experiences

of professional footballers. Specifically, the objects of this chapter are, firstly, to understand who possesses greater or lesser ability to control the process of transferring and, secondly, to examine the nature and forms of their control. The discussion that follows is set against the backdrop of the previous two chapters that examine transformations of self and self-conceptions as players transfer, and the way in which informal networks facilitate movement between clubs. Thus, the way in which players 'cushion' their sense of self from workplace realities such as rejection, and the means by which they develop informal networks which, among other things, may assist movement from one club to the next, are, for players, attempts to resist the control exerted by other people (club managers, player agents, club directors, partners and wives, and so forth) who are bound up in interweaving decision-making processes about the direction in which their careers are heading. This chapter, then, focuses on the social constraints experienced by players as they make decisions about future transfers.

Control

The concept of control has a long history in sociology, particularly for sociologists interested in debates concerning the nature of work and labour processes (Thompson, 1983). There is a great deal written about forms of control initiated by management and resistance by employees to managerial controls (see Collinson, 2000; Grint, 1998; Watson, 1995). The research undertaken in this area indicates that organisational control involves various types of work-based regulations including technical, bureaucratic and professional regulations; controls aimed at reducing or making unimportant employees' resistance; controls which attempt to discipline the potential maverick; and efforts to establish and disseminate the legitimacy of the organisation with all its inequalities and deprivations (Salaman, 1981). Nevertheless, within organisations, employers and those in formal controlling positions – such as football managers – are able to exercise a significant degree of control over subordinate members – in this instance, the players – by virtue of their control over desired resources. For professional footballers, the desired resources equate not only to improved financial conditions, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to opportunities to lengthen and improve contracts, and to gain or confirm playing status and build

reputations. Managers have control over sanctions too, by-and-large, and this is observable in terms of unfavourable treatment and, ultimately, rejection (see Chapter Six). In a number of occupational settings, research indicates that workers who experience, for example, the insecurities of short and medium term contracts, subordination and deprivation of opportunities – in professional football one might think in terms of a lack of exposure to first-team football – are likely to demonstrate some resistance to what are, for them, oppressive controls (Collinson, 2000).

Managers and managerial styles found in professional football are noted for inflexibility and authoritarianism respectively (Parker, 1996; Tomlinson, 1983; Wagg, 1984). It is suggested that authoritarian forms of control (of the kind employed by managers in order to call players who show signs of indiscipline or insubordination into line) mainly rely on financial rewards, penalties and threats such as rejection for their effectiveness, whereas normative forms of control (that relate to the possession of a 'good attitude') attempt to 'shape work culture and workers' subjectivity in order to ensure compliance' (Ezzy, 2001). Normative forms of control are central in Tomlinson's (1983) examination of the structures of control within football culture, a 'speculative' but sociologically pertinent article constructed using mainly the autobiographies of certain professional footballers who played in the 1970's. Despite the methodological shortcomings, Tomlinson makes a relevant point insofar as his focus is on club culture as a form of social control, a point that is borne out in this study on the attitudes to work in professional football. He suggests that the characteristics of football culture relate more to 'adolescent play' and 'juvenile giggles' than shop-floor resistance – although such embedded counter-cultures can involve 'horseplay' and 'banana time' (Watson, 1995) – and goes on to make the point that: 'Boys will be boys in football culture because the structures of control allow them to be little else' (p.173). Tomlinson (1983) outlines three potential ways in which 'football culture', an occupational culture in which relations of domination are constructed and reproduced among club personnel over time, constrains the behaviour and social activities of players. He states: 'First, structures of control in the club position the player rigidly at the bottom of the hierarchy. Second, the playing group is predictably fluid; the bulk of the team can disappear within weeks, for

various reasons, to be replaced by a new crop. And third, the collectivist dimensions of the culture of the player are directed, on the whole, towards essentially harmless laughs and jokes' (p.173). The notion of control in the workplace and the related debates located in the literature on labour processes, and Tomlinson's excellent discussion of football culture as a form of control, provide a backcloth against which to examine issues of control as they relate to processes of transferring.

For professional footballers, the process of transferring may come to signify what, for some players, might be considered a turning point, or at least a benchmark by which 'outsiders' may assess the direction or trajectory of their careers. At times, therefore, a transfer may be considered a fateful moment for players insofar as the move may indicate to them and to others a sudden rise or fall in fortunes. Thus, Chapter Six examines the transformation of self as players are transferred to 'big' clubs, as well as the ways in which they 'cushion' their sense of self and generate apologias as a means of 'rejecting their rejectors' when they move to a club of a lower status. The research data collected indicate that there are few occasions in which players are able to control their destiny. Historically it may be possible to identify certain 'gifted' players whose status is such that they are, or have been, able to choose for themselves for which club they would like to play or the conditions of their playing contract. More commonly, however, as indicated by these research data, the choices available to players are constrained in a number of ways.

Retain or Transfer

The legal regulations of the 'transfer system' in English professional football are the principle means by which the actions and intentions of players are 'controlled' when moving from one club to another. These regulations, of course, also constrain the plans of managers and directors who attempt to buy and sell players. The legislation relating to the transfer system in professional football has always appeared 'odd' to outsiders (Foster, 2001). The 'retain and transfer' system, which is the name given to the first set of rules relating to job mobility in professional football, 'is without parallel in the history of British industrial relations' (Sloane,

1969, p.181). The transfer system can be traced to a clause inserted in the regulations of the FA in 1885 which required all players to be registered annually with the Association. The clause, designed to protect smaller clubs by preventing players from club-hopping, instead resulted in the registration becoming something to be bought and sold in its own right (Morrow, 1999). Thus, it resulted in the creation of a transfer market. At the end of each playing season a player would be placed on either a retained list or the transfer list on the club's terms, the only proviso being that the terms be no lower than the agreed minimum wages and conditions. Effectively, clubs holding a player's registration had a monopoly over him in that any transfer required, most importantly of all, the consent of the club holding the player's registration.

Prior to the case of the former Arsenal and Newcastle United player, George Eastham, in 1963, the 'retain and transfer' system operated in almost all instances to the benefit of the club – that is, the club directors – who possessed the registration of players. For example, former England international, Sir Stanley Matthews, remarked on one year contracts as follows: 'Before the [1939-45] war, and also just after the war, you would get a letter saying "Stoke City", and addressed to you: "Dear Mr. Matthews, we've decided to retain you for the following year, your wage is so-and-so." Or they say, "Sorry you are on offer for a free transfer." We had no say. We were more or less like slaves in those days. I asked for a transfer one year before the war. I was turned down, so the club held you. You were tied. You couldn't do anything about it' (Taylor and Ward, 1995, p.38). T.G. Jones, a Welsh international, referred to a situation in which his club, Everton, did not listen to his appeals that, at the age of thirty one, he couldn't afford to be playing in the reserve side. He said, 'Well, I had no situation at all. I know that Matt Busby wanted me at Manchester United. I know that Tom Whittaker wanted me at the Arsenal. I'd been told this from good sources and one of them – I won't mention who it was – came to me and said, "Tom, you're wasting your time. You're on the transfer list but they won't transfer you. They've put you on the transfer list to make you happy, and that's where you're going to stay' (Taylor and Ward, 1995, p.38). Tomlinson (1983) argues that, 'Players were in many ways powerless' (p.155), and he cites the cases of former England

internationals, Wilf Mannion and Tom Finney, who, he claims, 'were controlled to the point of being someone else's property' (p.156).

From the initial legalisation for professional footballers drawn up in 1885 to the Eastham case in 1963, the balance of power was heavily in favour of club directors in terms of all *club* matters including team selection and the purchasing of new talent. The players in question dealt directly with the club chairmen and/or directors. It wasn't until the 1950's that football club managers increasingly began to take control of team affairs and thus became accountable for team performances (Wagg, 1984). Wagg (1984) states that a number of clubs didn't appoint a 'manager', in the modern sense of this term, until after 1945, and the title 'Secretary-Manager' served well into the 1950's; Arsenal, for example, did not alter the title until 1956. Prior to 1963, it would appear that for players the process of transferring – or the negotiating and signing of a new contract – was a particularly 'us' and 'them', bi-polar affair. From the viewpoint of the player, he was being sold or released to a club and, with or without his consent, the two clubs involved negotiated a deal that best suited their interests, financial or otherwise. The 'career' interests of the player were not of paramount concern for club directors, yet players were not without power, even prior to 1963. For example, T.G. Jones, who had requested a transfer from Everton as mentioned above, decided that he wasn't missed, even when he played on Saturdays for Hawarden Grammar School Old Boys, and despite being captain of Wales. He said: 'They didn't even ask where I had gone. I said, "Well, if you won't let me go, I'm afraid that I will walk out and play non-league football," because I'd already had a business offer from the men who ran Pwllheli Football Club ... Their attitude was "No one leaves Everton." And I did. It cost them a lot of money' (Taylor and Ward, 1995, p.39). So, even in circumstances in which players are much less able to constrain the actions of the more powerful club directors, players do have some power, for the directors have at least to take the player's actions into account. In these examples, in which power differentials between players and the club directors are very great, the directors had not only a higher degree of control over players, but also a higher degree of control over the processes of transferring as such. For transfers prior to 1963, then, it is possible to

understand the course of the transfer largely in terms of the plans and intentions of club directors.

In reality, few (if any) transfers can be characterised sociologically as *bi-polar* for they involve multiple groups of people who all may have different interests at stake; thus, expressed in simplified terms, all transfers involve at least the existing employer club, the employee player and the would-be employer club. So, following the end of the maximum wage in 1961 and the Eastham Case in 1963, the perception of players of the *multi-polar* nature of the process of transferring came more sharply into focus as club directors were stopped from retaining a player's registration when out of contract. Subsequently, between 1963 and 1995, a modified 'retain and transfer' system existed. In this period – a time period from which data concerning player transfers have been obtained for this study – players were not unconditionally free to negotiate a contract with a different club unless they were given a 'free transfer' by their employing club (Gardiner *et al*, 1998). In essence, the new transfer conditions required clubs either to grant 'freedom of contract' – in this case the player is literally a 'free' agent who can move to a new club on whatever terms he or his agent can negotiate – or, alternatively, the club can retain him as a registered player by offering a new deal on terms no less advantageous than the expired contract. With respect to the latter circumstances, the player is 'free' to negotiate a move to another club but this is subject to the club agreeing a transfer fee. In a large number of cases, as will be demonstrated, a player's desire to move may be frustrated if other clubs are not prepared to pay the required or prescribed transfer fee. Moreover, a player may submit to pressure to sign a new contract with a club to regain some security of employment (Gardiner et al, 1998).

Freedom of Contract

Freedom of contract might be considered to be among the principal means by which *players* have been enabled to make their own decisions about the trajectories of their careers. Magee (1998) suggests that, for players, 'freedom of contract' is generally regarded as a position of strength when bargaining for new employment and this view is supported, in part, by former Charlton Athletic

player, Garry Nelson. Nelson (1995) in his 'Dairy of a Season' comments that: ' "Freedom of contract" has made it possible for players to let their contracts expire and yet put themselves in an enhanced bargaining position. Consistently good form should clearly earn appropriate reward' (p.262). Nelson (1995) discusses the different perspectives possessed by players, but particularly those who are more experienced, and directors who are bound up in contract negotiations, in the following way:

> With players who are doing the business well enough to justify the original outlay on them and justify their first team selection, the club will not want the contract to expire. Every attempt will be made to offer a new one that is sufficiently attractive for the player to want to sign. But he (and certainly, where applicable, his agent!) will appreciate that he is negotiating from a position of strength. What he now considers 'attractive' may be a considerable escalation on his previous terms (p.262).

Nelson is not untypical of the majority of observers who have commented on transferring and changes to employment laws as they relate to football, insofar as he tends to focus on *player power* and the manner in which, in many cases, this has been bolstered.

So, an 'exploiter' (Magee, 1998) such as Sol Campbell, for example, who signed for the English Premier League club, Arsenal, cannot be blamed, according to Paul Hayward, for 'playing the market to his own spectacular advantage' (*The Daily Telegraph*, May 30, 2001). Hayward makes the point that 'Campbell's demands at Tottenham reflect the destructive player-power threatening football'. For twenty-six year old, England international, Sol Campbell, was able to turn down an improved offer from the Premier League club for whom he was formerly contracted, Tottenham Hotspur, and negotiate a new and vastly improved four-year contract with Arsenal, via his agent, Sky Andrew, without the concern of a transfer fee. Campbell was able to take advantage of the 1995 Bosman case which rules that transfer fees for players *out of contract* are illegal under European law. Thus, from 1995, players out of contract could move without a transfer fee. The distinctiveness of the example of Campbell in this context relates, in part, to his

power and status. That is, at twenty-six years old, he is among the wealthier and more financially secure Premier League players (he is reputed to be earning £6.5 million per year). Moreover he has a developing global reputation; he turned down offers from Inter Milan, Barcelona and Bayern Munich (*The Daily Telegraph*, July 7, 2001) before signing for Arsenal in the English Premier League. One might suggest that, since he possessed the higher power ratio, he was able to exploit the rules of transferring to his advantage; that is, to a much greater degree than most of his predecessors prior to 1995, he was able, in part, to control the process of transferring in which he was bound up.

Campbell's higher power ratio is understandable for he was rated among the best in his position; he was relatively young; and a club hoping to sign him would deal directly with him (and/or his agent) for he was *out of contract*: he was 'on a Bosman' as is common parlance among professional footballers. Thus, any club wanting to secure his talents would have to submit to his demands to a greater degree than he would have to submit to theirs. But even players who do not possess high power ratios of a more 'obvious' or celebrated nature may decide to let their contracts expire in order for them to become free agents. So, players who do not think they are a part of the plans of their manager – as discussed in Chapter Six – may decide to find a new club, even if that means taking a cut in wages or playing in a lower division, to acquire regular first team football. Alternatively, a young, ambitious player with a building reputation may decide against signing a renewed and, quite possibly, improved contract with their present club in a lower division so as to attract attention from 'clubs' of a higher status.

For example, a young, third division player interviewed for this study stated that he had made it clear to his manager that he wasn't going to sign a new contract because he 'wanted to see if anything was going to happen'. He said that local journalists were writing regularly of the scouts from other clubs who were coming to watch him play, but that 'it was all paper talk really, nothing definite was ever said. I was never sure that something was going to happen'. He recognised that not signing a new contract was a risky strategy, but when an offer from a first division club was made, he said: 'I never gave it a second thought. It was a chance for me to see if I was going to be able to play at a higher level'. Another young,

third division player made a similar comment insofar as he decided against signing a new contract after he was made aware that 'two or three clubs were interested in me to the extent that a scout was coming to watch me on a regular basis'. Unfortunately this player shattered his shoulder blade in a game and an offer never materialised. However, he went on to comment that, 'from what I've been told by people in the game, if I'd done alright in that game then there was going to be a firm bid on the table by the end of the week'. Both young players could not be described as being 'in control' of their destinies, but by not signing a new contract with their present club they embarked on a riskier course of action in order to pursue the occupational goal of playing at the highest possible standard. At this stage, then, both players can be said to be, on balance, playing 'for', rather than 'off', professional football: for these players, football is a 'vocation' (in the sense discussed by Weber (1965)).

All the players discussed thus far appear to be in positions of power, although the sources of their power may differ. For example, players who could be labelled 'exploiters', particularly in terms of the comments made by Nelson, are perceived, or perceive themselves, to be *in form*: Nelson (1995) refers, in this connection, to 'players who are doing the business' (p.262). One might suggest also that their sense of self as professional footballers is strong for they recognise that more than one club would like to employ them. Secondly, all the players are, or are becoming, available in terms of 'freedom of contract', a context that, for them, is considered one of strength. Prospective clubs, therefore, would not necessarily need to go through the process of 'tapping' – as discussed in Chapter Seven – and would not, therefore, pay a transfer fee. Yet, while the players considered above are of different ages and statuses, they are all able to use the factors mentioned as bargaining chips in order to locate themselves in enhanced negotiating positions. Whilst earning wages from playing is fundamental for all professionals, these players are also able to exploit their circumstances to pursue occupational goals.

Nelson continues by mulling over some of the complexities of contract discussions. Writing in abstract terms he explains the way in which even a player who is 'unwanted' by his present club may find himself in an enhanced bargaining position. He describes the conditions inherent as a classic multi-polar power-

struggle and how all parties involved have correspondingly less chance to maintain control of the changing course of contract negotiations. He writes:

> But the player may not be such an obvious asset. He may be getting long in the tooth, no longer performing at his former level. This may not weaken his bargaining position as much as might appear at first glance. Initially, he may have been signed for a large transfer fee plus a huge signing on fee and very substantial wages. The common sense move now may be to sell him. But in order to be able to command a transfer fee (as opposed to giving him the free and writing off all past investment), the club must have him on their books. That's to say, they must renew his contract on at least the same terms. Knowing a good thing when he sees it, the player is almost certain to re-sign at once. The club are now paying the same high level of monies as before to a player they don't really want but whom, if they want to balance their books at all, they need to sell at the same top end of the market they bought him in (Nelson, 1995; p.262).

In certain instances, particularly in the case of an older player whose contract is expiring, the club directors may offer the minimum deal legally acceptable in the hope that he attracts no interest and no other clubs make offers. The player, therefore, may have no option but to sign. But if there is outside interest, as one would expect for an *in form* player, then he has leverage and he may find he is in a position to play one club off against the other, or at least wait for the most advantageous deal to be proposed. Nelson's comments are useful, for he highlights the fact that the rules of transferring that relate to 'freedom of contract' have enabled players to use power resources previously denied them by club directors, in order to make decisions concerning the direction of their careers. Players are now able to utilise their talent, reputation and, in some instances, their age as bargaining chips in this process. They may still be in a position to pursue occupational goals. The situation described by Nelson demonstrates aptly why the process of transferring should be understood as a process of interweaving (Elias, 1978), for the sequences of moves and counter moves for players (and player agents), managers or club directors involved in contract negotiations can only be explained in terms of the imminent dynamics of their interdependence.

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Not all players, however, are able to exploit the social circumstances in which they are bound up in advantageous ways. Players who are out-of-form or favour (or who are not paid 'substantial wages'), or whose contract is not renewed, may have to find new clubs in order to revive their careers. Furthermore, a player whose contract is terminating at the end of the season, but who has not been informed of whether he is to be offered new terms, is likely to experience increasing psychological insecurities. These circumstances are more meaningful for older players, by-and-large, who have a greater number of responsibilities in terms of, for example, wives and/or children, and mortgages; and who possess, therefore, a heightened awareness of job security. One experienced Division One player, for instance, whose contract was terminating at the end of the 1998-99 season in which he was interviewed, expressed his feelings about the indeterminate position in which he found himself:

> Oh God, yes, it frightens me to death, you know, my contract running out
> at the end of the season. It's coming too quick ... I've got to get everything
> ready, all my qualifications behind me. I've got to get my pension all
> sorted out so I can finish when I'm thirty-five and then I can try and get a
> job that I want to do. But these last two years, I just feel as though things
> have come too quick, which is a nightmare ... I've got to be able to pay the
> mortgage.

The player said that in most circumstances having *freedom of contract* was 'a good thing', but at his age (thirty years) he needed to keep playing. When asked how he resolved the problem of feeling as though he was in *a state of limbo*, he replied: 'People keep saying to me, "Oh, you'll get a club, no problem, no problem". I'm not looking to leave but my contract runs out at the end of the season so I'm waiting for them to make up their minds. They haven't offered me a new contract at the moment and I can talk to other clubs in January. It's quite stressful, you know, but you just keep it to yourself'. Asked whether he talked to anyone *outside* the club the player made the following point: 'I speak to my girlfriend. In fact, recently, I said to her, "you know we could be living in a shed at the end of the garden at the end of this year". I've got a five year plan, up until I'm

thirty-five, and if I keep getting a contract we should be all right'. Unlike the previous examples, which highlighted the career-status concerns of (mainly younger) players who are looking to increase their reputations and fulfil occupational dreams, this older player, by contrast, prioritised contractual security at least until his thirty-fifth birthday as the focus of his attention. One might suggest, therefore, that he is playing 'off', rather than 'for', professional football; and, like other players interviewed, he does not desire, or attempt to achieve, the status of 'freedom of contract'. For many it is forced upon them at a time when they are seeking to extend job security for themselves and, maybe, dependents.

The above example is typical of a number of interviewees who described the time period leading up to the expiry date of their playing contracts. For many of these (mainly) older players, the prospect or imposition of 'freedom of contract' does not strengthen their capacity to achieve enhanced control over the process of transferring and, consequently, over the directions of their careers. Younger players may struggle to perceive the likely course of such negotiations and, hence, their career moves, for they have limited reputations and networks of contacts in the game, while other players may struggle to establish themselves as first-team regulars. For all these players – young and old – their ability to gain a degree of control is limited insofar as they are constrained by the choices they perceive are available to them. Some of the players interviewed, for example, suggested that they thought that certain managers withheld information about prospective clubs whose attention had been drawn by recent good performances. So, if only one club shows an interest in a player then he (and/or his agent) is constrained to deal solely with representatives from this club. A former Division One player, now playing for a club in Division Three, said that he hadn't signed the contract which was offered to him and that he wasn't included in the pre-season tour to Malta. The player had to find another club in this period, as, according to his manager, he wasn't figuring in the future plans. He said that three managers approached him at this time but his choices were constrained, and he described the circumstances as follows: 'So the manager of [the club for whom he eventually signed] at the time phoned me and asked me to go up there. I think I also spoke to the managers of [two Division Three clubs] as well. I didn't go to [one of the Division Three clubs] because it was too far, as I was happy living where I was. So, the other two

clubs were my only real choices because they were within commuting distance'. This player went on to express his thoughts about this move, suggesting that: 'I was happy to sign for [the manager] because it was still within commuting distance of [my home town], which was important to me. I didn't want to uproot across the country unless somebody was prepared to pay me a lot more money, which they weren't'. A number of, mainly older, players discussed the geographical constraints in relations to potential transfers, for many were not prepared to 'uproot' suddenly and move their families and relocate to an area in which they had no friendship ties. One experienced player, now retired, said that in his experience it was common for players to buy or rent accommodation during the week and return to their families at the weekends, and after matches – a point that will be developed later in this chapter.

Another experienced player, who had played for clubs in Division One, Two and Three, talked of his mental deliberations leading up to the point when a decision was made concerning his future. He recounts also his actions and refers, indirectly, to his (in)ability, in the early stages of bargaining, to control the course of contract negotiations. In the following account, the player describes the sequence of events and makes reference to the Bosman Ruling, which had come into effect in that season:

> I didn't know whether it was out of fear or maybe it was because it was the last year of my contract again, but I was playing very well. Come Christmas time I had played every game and [the manager] made me captain. We were well up in the league all season and at the end of the season we got into the play-offs and I tried to negotiate a new contract, as I was in the first wave of this Bosman Ruling. They offered me a new contract, effectively they offered me another fifty quid a week, and I wanted more money. I felt I deserved it because I'd been on the same money for two years or three years, I think. Plus they'd been spending more money on players' wages in the last twelve months, plus I was captain of the team that had got to the play-offs and I thought, you know, I deserved to be at least on equal levels with them. So I haggled, I spoke to

the chairman once and then I haggled with the manager for about three months and I couldn't get anywhere.

He said that throughout the summer close season a number of clubs had contacted him concerning a potential move away, for he was now 'free' from contract constraints – he was 'on a Bosman'. He went on to explain the difficulties that may arise for players who are *free agents* and those who find themselves in circumstances similar to the one described above:

> I spoke to [two Division Three clubs] but, because there were so many players available, they were all reluctant to commit themselves. They were all offering two or three month contracts and basically I thought it was ridiculous. I mean effectively it's a two or three month trial for a thirty-two year old defender who's played a couple of hundred league games. I wasn't prepared to do that.

When asked how he coped during this period he said:

> It was difficult. It was a stressful summer really because of the uncertainty with the situation at my current club. I didn't seem to be getting anywhere with the manager which didn't surprise me after my previous experiences with him. It was awful to be honest. I ended up having to come back at the end of last pre-season just to find him because I hadn't signed a new contract. I ended up going down just to get hold of him, just to pin him down. In the end he couldn't offer me the sort of terms that I wanted and I wasn't prepared to sign for another two years and just keep making the same trips to play for a man who I really hated playing for to be honest. I really had nothing left to play for to be honest and so I thought, well maybe this was the time, you know, to go off in a different direction. I've been playing professional football for about the last fifteen years and you get to thirty-two and you realise that you are never going to be a millionaire or play for Manchester United and all that. But I've got the brains to go on and do something else.

The occupational position of *free agent* – otherwise interpreted as unemployed – for this player does not generate the 'advantageous' effects which may befall a player such as England international, Sol Campbell, mentioned earlier, for this player does not possess the power differentials to control either the contract negotiations or the process of transferring in which he is bound up.

Experienced players, such as the one quoted above, might be labelled 'the exploited' using Magee's terminology, and it might be argued – see Chapter Nine – that there exists a fine balance between possessing 'freedom of contract' and age, for some older players expressed the thought that they felt 'used and discarded'. The player quoted above, for example, said that he was among the first wave of footballers affected by the Bosman Ruling, which in some circumstances has led to enhanced contract positions for players, whilst for others it has reduced their 'power' potential. Yet, the Bosman Ruling, and its ability to enable certain players (exploiters) to enhance their bargaining position, has received a great deal of attention from the media while few people have commented on the negative consequences of this ruling from the point of view of players whose power position is less strong. A former Premier League player, for instance, made the following remarks when asked whether he considered the new ruling to be advantageous for players:

> It is if you're at the top of the tree. The biggest thing is if you're talking about the Bosman ruling, I remember, last year there were just under 600 pros available on free transfer, whether that's through the Bosman ruling, players being over 24, out of contract, or clubs freeing them, or what have you. It is good if you're in a situation where you know you've got 4,5 or 6 clubs after you, or if you're Dennis Bergkamp or Steve McManaman. But if you're like Joe Soap who's played in the 2nd or 3rd Division for 10 years, then it doesn't really do you any favours ... it's good if you're the cream of the crop or you're the top of the tree, and it's good if lower league clubs want you, but if nobody wants you then I'm not sure it's a good thing.

The player quoted above reaffirms a point expressed in Chapter Six concerning the desire for all players to be, and to feel, 'wanted', as even in the context of the Bosman ruling, i.e., post 1995, players who are not wanted may find themselves unemployed or having few alternatives other than to accept their first, and possibly only, contract offer.

Another former Premier League player described a set of circumstances in which, as events unfolded, the status of 'freedom of contract' – he was 'on a Bosman' – served to heighten anxieties concerning his playing position. He said:

> I was offered a new contract which I didn't sign. I was offered it initially in about November. In December I was offered a slight improvement on my contract, which was good money, but the club was very rocky and so I didn't sign it at that time. I'd arranged to meet with [the manager], and we were going to discuss it further. But then he was sacked and [the next manager] took over. He spoke to me and said, 'you know it's a bit rocky at the minute'. We were fighting relegation. We agreed that we'd sort it out come the end of the season. I thought it would be better to agree terms when it's quietened down a bit at the end of the season. So it ended up that we were relegated. I went back in to see the manager and he offered me a new contract, but it had gone down. It was virtually half what I was on. It had been a massive reduction. So I had all summer to think about it and I was on Bosman anyway, so I went away. There was a lot happening anyway, as we had our first baby at the end of May, so that obviously took up a lot of our time. I still had this whole issue at the back of my mind all summer. The situation as I left it was that if another club came in with an offer I couldn't turn down then I was going to have to go. If not, then I had the offer from [the club] to go back to. So I left it all summer, and nothing had happened at all. It was very quiet indeed club wise.

He said he was anxious, although friends in and outside 'the game' were reassuring about his predicament. Nevertheless, for the player in question, 'it was a very nervey time'. He continued his account saying that:

I was half resigned to the fact that nothing was going to happen now. I'd just have to sign for [my previous club]. It was a big reduction in money but at the end of the day if that's what it's got to be, it was still decent money. I could afford to pay the mortgage and that's the main concern. And then [the manager] phoned me up one morning and said, 'I think we've got to talk firstly about pre-season, and get the contract sorted out'. I said I was quite happy to do that as I didn't like it hanging over my head anyway. Then two hours later on, I get another phone call and the manager tells me that the Chairman has withdrawn the offer altogether now. So that was it. I'd suddenly gone from at least having an offer to fall back on, to absolutely nothing. So, I was twitching [highly anxious] them.

Eventually a manager of a Division One club made an approach to the agent representing this player and he was able to sign a contract before the start of the following season, though he and his wife and baby needed to relocate a considerable distance south. Expressing his satisfaction in this outcome the player said, by way of concluding the description of this particular stage of his career, that 'in the end it worked out fantastically well for me. I was relieved with the way it went'. If one compares transfers historically, there is much less certainty post 1963 about the control and planning of the process of transferring and, therefore, less certainty in predicting outcomes, particularly for the likes of the player quoted above and his contemporaries.

It seems to be the case, from the interview data collected and from statements made in the media, that transfer processes post 1963, but particularly post Bosman, i.e., post 1995, typically involve more people. Writing in *The Guardian* (September 8, 2001), Vivek Chaudhary claims that transfers are more complicated than ever, and makes the following comparative point: 'Transfers used to involve a telephone call from one club manager to another. With the game becoming more global and international transfers increasing, the number of people involved in the buying and selling of players has also multiplied'. Chaudhary quotes player agent, Rachel Anderson, to the effect that: 'The whole transfer system has become an incredibly complicated industry. Quite often you have a deal and several parties want to get involved. It's getting worse because the money is greater'. So, as the number of people involved in transfer processes grow, the individual player may

not only find negotiations increasingly opaque and uncontrollable, but he also gradually becomes aware of his inability to understand and control them. This may explain, in part, why players have come increasingly to employ agents to act on their behalf.

Throughout the history of professional football, power ratios involving club personnel have usually been extremely unequal; thus, club directors with relatively great authority and control have exercised their power chances over team managers and players to the full, often unscrupulously for their own purposes. From the first day that a player signs for a club, he has a degree of power relative to the manager (and club directors) as long as he is considered to be valuable in playing terms. But players can lose power, particularly if they sustain a bad injury, or lose form, as all players do. If there is a change of manager, for example, a player who is not in the plans of the new manager – of which examples have been included in this chapter – may find that he is starved of exposure to first team football, and his status and sense of self as a first team regular may diminish. But even though the club manager and club directors may have power over the player, the player is not altogether powerless: the power of the player is in proportion to the manager's dependence on the level of performance achieved by the player and, hence, the team. Yet there are other people who may find themselves bound up in the broader process of transferring and, in this context, may possess a degree of relative power. It is to the first of these – the club doctors and physiotherapists – that attention now turns.

Club doctors and physiotherapists

The majority of players who transfer from one club to another do so against a backdrop of injuries. Information pertaining to their medical history is important for prospective club executives prior to them signing a contract. Few club directors would want to invest club capital in a player – a potential club asset – whose health is in question. No systematic data were collected on medicals in either the club doctor, physiotherapist or player interviews. They are a regular

feature of player transfers and are, therefore, relevant in any discussion of who possesses an ability to control the process of transferring.

Club doctors and physiotherapists are drawn into the process of transferring insofar as medical examinations are a usual feature of transfers. As a result, club managers and directors are drawn into the realm of medical consultation, a context in which, one may assume, they relinquish a significant degree of control to the medical practitioners upon whom they rely for a *professional* opinion of the players they examine. Moreover, there is a general assumption in encounters between practitioners and their clients that 'doctor knows best' (Oakley, 1980). Medical practitioners are members of a professional body[3] and possess, by virtue of their formally recognised status, an official mandate to apply their knowledge and values, as Waddington notes (1996), free from 'external control'. Freidson (1970) has written about forms of 'client control' in medical relationships and how one of the tasks of medical professionals is to persuade 'the client' to follow their advice. The clients in the case of professional football include the manager and club director. Yet, the advice of medical practitioners is not always trusted (Lupton, 1996), and in the context of professional football medical practitioners may themselves be subject to control by powerful *clients* (Freidson, 1970) – in this instance club directors and managers – particularly as many are part-time employees of the club (See Waddington et al, 1999). For example, club directors and managers may experience pressure from club supporters to be seen to be actively attempting to purchase new players to strengthen the football squad. This pressure may consequently be deflected onto club doctors and physiotherapists to pass fit a potential player whose long, or even medium, term health may be in question. Moreover, the pressure felt by club directors may be such that they feel unable to act on the advice provided by the club doctor; hence undermining the legitimacy of the doctor's position. In such circumstances, club doctors and physiotherapists who apply their professional medical understandings come to be 'clients' themselves, having neither exclusive nor final responsibility for the information they provide. Ultimate authority lies with the club directors. Under these 'patronage' relationships (Johnston, 1972), club doctors may serve and advance the interests of club directors and managers. A particularly striking example of this latter circumstance is cited later[4].

What constitutes a player 'medical' is, however, at matter of debate. For instance, when asked whether or not he met the club doctors in person prior to signing contracts at respective clubs, one former Premier League player made the following remark:

> No. Well I say that, I met some of them. I'm thinking of the medicals that you do. At [a Premier League club], I don't think it was the club doctor that did it, I think it was the physio that did all the tests. At [another Premier League club] I think it was the same, the physio took you to all the places you had to go to. It was the doctor here at [a Division One club] in conjunction with the physio, but there are different levels of medical the higher up you get if you see what I mean. Obviously at [a Premier league club] it was a lot more in-depth.

A definitive description of a player medical is not possible based on data gathered for this study yet, according to the player quoted above, they may alter from one club to the next. Neither is it possible to say conclusively whether or not the advice offered by a medical practitioner is taken into account. Yet player medicals are a common feature of the transfer process.

It is usual to read in the print media about player *medicals* as transfer negotiations between club directors and managers, player agents and players conclude. On some (albeit rare) occasions, advice provided can lead some club directors to reject an offer from a selling club. For example, former Newcastle United winger, Keith Gillespie, failed a medical prior to a proposed £3.5 million move to Middlesborough (*The Daily Telegraph*, August 3, 1998). The central problem, and one that appears relatively common, was that Gillespie had an existing ankle injury which would take, it was estimated by the buying club's doctor, a further two months from the start of the new football season to repair fully. Clearly, Middlesborough didn't want to buy a player who could not contribute to performances, and was, therefore, a 'non-producer' (Waddington *et al*, 1999, p.23). Similar circumstances arose for Dutch international, and former PSV Eindhoven centre-forward, Ruud van Nistelrooy, whose potential British record

£18.5 million signing to Manchester United fell through following an injury to his right knee. van Nistelrooy sustained the injury prior to Manchester United officials completing contract negotiations. The Manchester United manager, Alex Ferguson, remarked that: 'Nothing will be sorted out until the boy comes over next week and has a medical on his knee ligament injury and we sort out other things' (*The Daily Telegraph*, November 27, 2001). The medical test revealed that he had not fully recovered from his knee injury and it was reported that Alex Ferguson asked to see van Nistelrooy *in action* before completing the deal. Again, the Manchester United directors didn't want to purchase a player who could not contribute to team performances. The most common interjection of medical staff in terms of the process of transferring therefore appears when players have *existing* injuries the extent of which – in terms of future matches missed – requires specialist medical opinion. What is sociologically interesting about these players is that they have both performed at the highest domestic and international levels and could be considered among the types of 'powerful' players who, according to Magee's (1998) criteria, are typical of 'exploiters'. Yet social circumstances *beyond their control* have constrained their ability to manage the direction of their careers at these particular junctures.

It is not, however, only in contexts related to purchasing players that medical practitioners may be bound up in transfer processes, willingly or otherwise. For example, one experienced, former international player interviewed for this study provided a striking example of unprofessional conduct on the part of the club doctor. In this incident (reported in Waddington and Roderick, 2002) the club doctor at this Premier league club was clearly acting as an agent on behalf of the club, and used confidential medical information about a player to advance the interests of the club over and against those of the player. The player described what happened as follows:

> The club doctor, in my opinion, totally compromised his situation. I'd had [an operation] and my contract was up at the end of the season ... I was approached by [three leading English clubs], Atletico Madrid and Lyon. Three or four weeks later, when I was talking to these clubs, I got summoned to the club doctor's ... the club doctor called me and said

would I go round to his house ... I arrived there and he was there with the surgeon who did my operation ... the surgeon wasn't particularly happy about being there. He [the club doctor] said, 'You're thinking about leaving the club this summer?' I said 'Yes'. He said, 'Well, the surgeon has told us that you've only got another year at the most to play football. If we make that common knowledge, no club in the world would pay millions of pounds for you'. I said, 'Well, what are you telling me?' He said, 'Well, if you're thinking of leaving the club and we made that common knowledge, then ... no-one would buy you'. So ... I ended up agreeing a new deal to stay.

The incident described by the player had taken place several years previously and, at the time of the interview, the player was still playing for the same club. The player said that he thought the club doctor was probably acting under great pressure, not in this case from the manager but from the club chairman, but he added that this did not excuse the doctor's behaviour: 'He was probably under great pressure to do that, but he's done wrong'.

The purpose of this discussion has been to describe some of the ways in which football club medical staff may be bound up in transfer processes. Their primary purpose relates to player medical examinations and the interpretation of results, although their involvement may stretch further as exhibited by the example of the club doctor described above who acted as an agent on behalf of the club. This latter example is useful however for it highlights the complexity of the power-ratios among people involved in transfer negotiations, specifically club doctors, who are 'powerful agents' in their own *professional* right and their clients who, in this particular instance, may also be their employers.

Wives and Partners[5]

'I wouldn't wish it on anyone'.

Ann Lee, talking of her life as the wife of a professional footballer.

In most football clubs in England, the formal employment positions such as player, manager, coach, physiotherapist, director and so on, are well established and from one club to the next one is able to identify relatively easily the people who occupy these positions. Generally speaking, although players will already be familiar with the structures of power among these relationships when they transfer to new clubs, specific personnel (i.e., different managers) are able to shape these power relations because in professional football job descriptions are not precise – in fact, in many football clubs there is an absence of job descriptions. The perception by players of their own positions of power relative to other players alters, for instance, as they sustain injuries or are dropped because of a loss of form, and these changing personal circumstances may lead to the generation of *personal* issues for them. When they move to a new club their sense of their *own* power may become re-established. This point is developed in Chapter Six yet its pertinence at this juncture relates to the fact that the process of transferring not only has an impact upon the player, but also on his wife or partner and children. On a broader level, the partner[6] and family of a player are also bound up among the network of relations which characterize professional football and they experience too the effects of changing balances of power.

Tony Cascarino, for example, provides a good illustration of the way in which the family members of players are affected by the player's profession in his revealing autobiography, 'Full Time' (2000). The following extract relates to a period shortly after he transferred from Celtic in Glasgow to Chelsea football club: 'We moved to London but the cataclysm continued at Chelsea. I was booed at Stamford Bridge on the day I made my debut, and then Michael came home from school one afternoon and inflicted the cruelest blow of all. The boys in his class had been talking about me. "You're not very good, Dad, are you?" he said. How do you respond to something like that? What do you say to your six-year-old son?

That his friends are wrong? That there's a lot more to the game than what they hear from their dads? What's your defence when you're thirty-one years old and your career is in freefall? There was nothing to do but swallow hard and resolve to make him proud' (2000, p.5). Thus, an examination of the *consequences* of a process of transferring may lead to a more adequate understanding of the interconnections between the home, work and family life for players.

It may appear, so far, that the examination of the process of transferring has been undertaken in relative isolation from people 'outside' professional football, for little has been mentioned in terms of the input of the significant others of players, particularly their partners. Chapter Seven looks at the informal networks developed by players in this connection, yet, generally speaking, their networks involve individuals who might be said to be part-and-parcel of the 'football industry', for instance, player agents. The household, however, provides an appropriate focus from which to examine the interdependence between 'home' and 'work'. Although it is not possible to undertake a full examination of these links in this study, it would be inappropriate to view the 'home', 'work' and 'family life' as discrete subjects. For example, it would be non-sociological to perceive the household as a 'black box' (Bonney and Love, 1991) from which decisions concerning a player's career emanate. So, in this section, the very public spheres of work and the private spheres of day-to-day domestic life and relationships are not considered as separate, but are recognised as overlapping and interdependent.

Of course, at the heart of this question is the significance of the partner in relation to the process of transferring. More specifically, the focus concerns the degree of relative power of partners to impact on decision-making processes relating to transferring, often involving geographical relocation. This is the 'problem' addressed in this section. From data collected during the interviews and from various secondary sources, one might argue that job relocation is the key issue for the partners of players. Labour market migration is a relatively rare event – with less than 3 per cent of couples making such moves in any one year (Bruegel, 1996) – yet in the context of professional football simultaneous job and geographical relocation is commonplace for one or all members of a family.

In mainstream sociological and psychological literature there are a number of recent studies which focus on the changes to levels of stress that may be produced in the course of job relocation (Luo and Cooper, 1990; Martin, 1999; Munton, 1990). According to this body of literature, *job relocation* refers to the process of a simultaneous job and geographical move. It is generally thought to be the case that moving job and house can both be stressful life events but when they co-occur, as is often the case for professional footballers, it is hypothesised that high levels of stress maybe experienced by the relocator and his or her family (Munton, 1990). Relocation, or job transfer, in particular, can have profound effects upon the lives of individuals and families. It can require changes in children's schools, partners jobs, and also provoke difficulties associated with selling and buying property in changing housing markets. This small but growing body of literature, which has been undertaken mostly by psychologists of work, draws a number of conclusions which are relevant for the study of professional footballers and their movement from one club to another. For example, it is generally assumed that job relocations resemble other commonly regarded stressful life events. In particular, they disrupt routines of daily life, are accompanied by changes in social context and provoke feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, loss of control as well as challenge (Munton and West, 1995). There are three 'factors' that are commonly implicated by psychologists as 'causes' of relocation stress, namely; age, sex, and whether the relocator has a family. In particular, having a child is associated with greater levels of relocation stress.

The social relationships between work and the home however should be viewed as a process, changing over time as people develop through their life span. A central issue in the job relocation literature concerns the effects such a move has on the partner of the relocating employee, sometimes referred to as the 'trailing spouse' (Martin, 1996). The often-cited reason for greater stress levels for females – as the 'trailing spouse' - is that they feel isolated when they move, are bored, lonely and lack a social network. In addition, they typically spend long periods of time at the new home and/or taking care of children and, in a significant number of cases, are charged with settling chores (Luo and Cooper, 1990). By contrast, relocating male employees benefit from social interaction in the workplace. Consequently, the

levels of stress experienced by men decreases whereas with women they tend to stay the same (Martin, 1996). It could be argued that since relocators often move to better jobs or because they are promoted, the anticipated 'negative' effects associated with the move are counterbalanced by an improved work situation. The general literature in this specific area suggests that while people questioned in past surveys viewed job relocation as an opportunity for new job challenges and future career enhancement, and were unwilling to turn down a transfer for fear of jeopardizing their career, nowadays over 60% of people refuse a move at some time in their careers because of the potential disruption it may cause (Munton, 1990). There is little doubt that job relocation is a common career contingency for professional football players. Moreover, for nearly all the players interviewed for this study, transferring to another club, whether or not it involved geographical relocation, is viewed more in terms of an opportunity than a potential disruption. So, a central issue in the job relocation literature concerns the (often unintended) consequences such a move has on the partner of the relocating employee, sometimes referred to as the 'trailing spouse' (Martin, 1996); it is these consequences which may constrain and enable the behaviour of partners in terms of the process of transferring.

The issue of relocation in the context of professional football is interesting as, from the viewpoint of a player, transferring to a new club is usually considered in positive terms. As discussed in Chapter Six, a transfer presents a player with the opportunity to re-establish his identity as a first-team regular and to feel wanted, characteristics which underpin his sense of 'self'. In this regard, consideration should also be given to the stage reached by the player in his career and whether, on balance, he considers himself to be playing 'for' football, or playing 'off' football. Both scenarios, however, may lead a player to consider a move which necessitates geographical relocation. According to Ortiz (1997), who has undertaken one of the few studies of partners of professional athletes, many wives and partners of players have come to terms with the fact that their husbands are 'married' to their sport careers first and to them second. From the perspective of the partners of professional footballers, however, the problem may be viewed from an alternative perspective. For example, it may be the case that they are tied to their husbands economically and, thus, recognise the need to relocate in order to

secure an income, regardless of whether or not they wish to do so. The reaction to a move involving relocation may also relate to the degree to which the wife or partner 'identifies' with the playing career of the player (Thompson, 1999). Thus, they may feel as though they must avoid overt conflict when discussing a potential transfer by suppressing their own wishes. Given the typically short-term nature of football contracts and, relatively speaking, overall playing careers, the partner may place prime importance on the career of the player and, therefore, forfeit or 'trade-off' (Jarvis, 1999) their personal desires. That said, a decision made by a player and his partner about moving to seek work following redundancy from a club, which may involve a step down in status for the player, is a very different kind of decision from one which relates to a promotion to the *big-time*. So, it may be argued that the pressures on them to acquiesce to a 'mobile lifestyle' are both economic and cultural. The cultural norm that married couples live together[7], wedded to the traditional notion that a partner follows her husband wherever his work takes him, has been historically very strong and very significant in this context.

Since Bosman in 1995, the activities of the partners of professional footballers have been more closely scrutinized and interest in particular relationships and infamous incidents have come to be amplified by the media. This interest relates, in part, to the celebrity status achieved (Rojek, 2001) by a number of Premier League players. There has been a media led rising of interest in the wives and partners of, in particular, high profile professional footballers, since midway through the 1990's. Arguably the zenith of this interest was the ITV drama entitled – imaginatively – 'Footballers' Wives'. The women in this series were characterised as variations on a well-known stereotype with qualities including, for instance, bleached blonde hair, sparkly nails, all-year tans and they were presented wearing skimpy dresses and revealing clothes in many scenes. Missing on this shortlist however is the anonymity 'expected' (Thompson, 1999) of wives and partners in many circumstances of their husbands' sports career. This point has been substantiated by McKensie (1999) who claims that among the important lessons she learnt as wife of an American footballer was that, 'in the world where I lived most of my life, I was an afterthought at best, and my existence was acknowledged only because of my connection to my NFL husband' (p.234). Yet,

in professional football in England, interest in the wives and partners of players has increased, in part, since the well-publicised partnership of Manchester United and England international, David Beckham, and pop-star, Victoria Beckham, better known as Posh Spice of the pop group, Spice Girls. Alyson Rudd (*The Times*, 01/10/00) states that, of late: 'Some wives are prepared to give interviews, some have careers and some are more famous than their husbands'. Alongside the plentiful images of celebrity *matches* between players and pop stars, actresses and other public figures, there have been a number of meaningful articles and interviews which have explored the daily lives of wives and partners who do not crave limelight in their own right.

Commuting relationships

Among the most notable episodes in which a wife was considered to have influenced the process of transferring was that involving Premier League defender, David Unsworth, and his wife, Jayne Unsworth. Formerly a player with Everton in the North-West, Unsworth was keen to move from London-based West Ham to a Premier League club further North. Unsworth was quoted in *The Times* (July 30, 1998) saying that, 'my wife and I are uncomfortable living down there [London]'. Despite renewed interest from Premier League club, Everton, he agreed to a £3 million offer from Aston Villa. On his arrival at Aston Villa, Unsworth asked the manager, John Gregory, permission to live on Merseyside, which meant a daily round-trip of 230 miles to attend training. However, after only five days Unsworth informed John Gregory that he had made a mistake and that he wanted to be released from his contract in order to rejoin Everton, the club where he began his career. Alyson Rudd (*The Times*, October 1, 2000) commenting on the male-domination of professional football suggests that, 'football is in a time warp' and, in this connection, she wrote: 'When David Unsworth dared to adhere to his wife's wishes and admitted his move to Aston Villa was a mistake because Mrs Unsworth wanted to live back on Merseyside, there was outrage'. Rudd went on to suggest that this 'outrage' would not compare to the outcry, 'if players started letting their wives decide where they should play'. Reacting angrily to Unsworth's transfer request, the Aston Villa manager, John Gregory, suggested that the player and his wife had laboured under the erroneous belief that Birmingham was almost as close to Liverpool as Bolton. When asked

about the transfer request, Gregory quipped to journalists that unforeseen late homecomings had apparently led Jayne 'to throw the dinner in the bin'. He went on to say that: 'We all know who wears the trousers in that house' (*The Daily Telegraph*, July 30, 1998).

The example involving David Unsworth is useful for it alludes to a number of patterns that are sociologically pertinent for enhancing an understanding of, firstly, the way in which players transfer from one club to another and, secondly, more general changes between males and females in the social spheres of 'work' and 'home'. It seems clear from his comment that the Aston Villa manager, John Gregory, possesses an unambiguous idea of the behavioural expectations of the partners of professional footballers. His comments reflect traditional dominant male attitudes in general in which segregated gender roles lie at the heart of expectations[8]. One can assume, therefore, that Gregory doesn't think it is the place of partners to interfere in football or career-related decisions. Yet, it is clear from the example of David and Jayne Unsworth that, to some degree, partners *are* influential. It may be that, in the context of professional football, there may be some eradicating of the longstanding expectation that partners should adopt the role of the 'trailing wife' (Bruegel, 1996; Martin, 1996). Players may decide to travel long distances each day to the football club – as was the case with David Unsworth – or to buy or rent a flat and live part of each week away from the family in order to play and train.

The argument presented in this section is not that there has been a major shift from the traditional expectation of the 'trailing wife' to a situation in which all players and their partners consider, first and foremost, some form of *commuting* relationship. The prevailing situation for many – probably a majority of – partners (and their children) is that they continue to relocate with the player when he transfers to a new club, particularly over major distances. For instance, writing in *The Sunday Times* (January 13, 2002), Richard Woods and Rachel Dobson claim that 'young and far-from-rich wives have found their lives uprooted at a few days' notice when their footballer husbands have been transferred from one end of the country to another'. Vicky Wilson, who is engaged to former Darlington Town player, Phil Brumwell, said that relocating twice in one year was expensive and disruptive, 'but it's part of life for a footballer's family' (*The Daily Mirror*,

January 2, 2002). One former Premier League defender, interviewed for this study, made the following observation when asked how his wife adjusted to a move north:

> She loved it straight away. She's very outgoing and makes friends easily. Talking to other players it can be really difficult for the wives, a lot of them don't settle and get home sick. I can honestly say that when it comes to my football, not that I wouldn't worry about [my wife], but I know that I can go anywhere and she would come with me and we'd be happy and it wouldn't be a problem. She gets on with people and mixes really well, but for a lot of players it must be hard, they think that they can't move too far away because of the wife; David Unsworth scenario.

The wife of another experienced player, John Hendrie, who played for seven clubs in all four football leagues, recalled a time following his transfer to Newcastle United as being one of abject misery. Quoted in *The Times* (March 14, 1998), Linda Hendrie said: 'We moved into this detached bungalow ... I had two babies, one literally under each arm, and didn't know a soul. The washing was piling up, I didn't know where the nearest shop was. I just hated it and felt like crying'. *The Times* journalist, Mark Hodkinson, wrote that Linda eventually settled in Newcastle although, as he puts it, 'it was hardly worth the effort. After just one season, Hendrie arrived back in West Yorkshire when he joined Leeds United' (*The Times*, March 14, 1998). Hodkinson went on to write that, while Linda Hendrie was pleased to return to this region – a region in which they had previously lived – John Hendrie never really saw eye-to-eye with Howard Wilkinson, then the Leeds United manager. Hodkinson explains that Linda Hendrie understood all too well that 'they would soon be on the move again'. In this context, Linda Hendrie commented: 'I knew John was unhappy at Leeds but I didn't want to move house again. Everything was still in boxes from the last move. Joe [their son] has lived in five different houses and he isn't even two years old' (*The Times*, March 14, 1998). John Hendrie subsequently moved to Middlesbrough United who agreed that he could commute to the ground, a round trip of 125 miles.

The examples above highlight how transferring may impact on the lives of the partners of professional footballers (and their children). One can suggest, on the basis of the interview data and the anecdotal evidence collected, that there is a cultural expectation that job relocation is a part of the game to which players and their families must adapt. The lives of the partner can be dominated by the player's work to some degree, particularly if they are tied to him economically. Many partners relinquish a significant degree of control over their own employment prospects, their lifestyles as well as their identities. When a player transfers from one club to another, therefore, there can be a great deal of disruption for his partner. For the player, however, the mobile lifestyle has a thread of continuity, precisely because each move relates to their work, and at each club they have new workmates with whom they can connect immediately. A recently retired former Premier League player expressed this point succinctly. When asked whether transferring posed a problem for players *and* their families, he said:

> I don't think it is a problem for the players. Because when a player joins a new club he's got twenty new friends, his teammates. It's hard on the families though, especially the wives. I mean I've heard of wives who get clinically depressed about things. I mean they might move to somewhere, move into a village. She doesn't know anybody. She might have young babies. They can get very fed up. The lad's out training every morning, having a laugh with his new teammates. And it's not really difficult for him. But tasks like getting the kids into new schools, I mean, that's all put on the wives. It can be very difficult for them.

The options available for players and their families are, however, not simply a matter of personal choice, but are linked to tight job markets which, for many players, reduce the opportunity to choose positions in specific locations. A consequence of this apparent lack of choice is that players may be constrained to move significant distances in order to play first team football. For the partners of players, such transfers, in previous eras, have resulted almost automatically in geographical relocation if such a move was considered necessary.

It is argued here, however, that the expectation that partners (and children) will 'trail' the player *without* hesitation is becoming less strong. Where it is reasonably possible for them to do so, it is normal for a player (particularly those with families) to travel each day to his new club in order to avoid the hassle and stress of relocating. For example, Garry Nelson, who transferred from Brighton and Hove Albion to Charlton Athletic, travelled from his home in Worthing to South London each day. On the way Nelson met with three colleagues at Gatwick and together they travelled to the training ground: they named their route to work 'the Gatwick Express' (Nelson, 1995). Yet, while many families will continue to trail, there exists a trend in which players and their partners are increasingly coming to decide upon a 'commuting relationship' for the duration of the player's contract. In this context a commuting relationship relates not only to someone, like Garry Nelson, who travels long distances to work each day, but also to couples who live apart for one or more days each week (Gerstel and Gross, 1984). A recently retired Premier League player referred to this trend in the following way:

> **Player**: The thing with being a footballer's wife is, you've got to be prepared to move. I can never really understand wives who say they don't want to move but you hear about so many marriages where the wife stays in her home town and the player moves about and stays in hotels during the week and comes back at the weekends.
>
> **MR**: Does that scenario occur regularly?
>
> **Player**: A lot of that goes on because a lot of wives are so stubborn. They won't move. I just can't understand it. If you're a family you go where the work is: you go together.

This player provides an indication of the prevalence of commuting relationships and, concurrently, the traditional expectations males place on partners. However, despite these traditional expectations, partners have at their disposal a degree of persuasive power, and some − like, for instance, Jayne Unsworth − can bring to bear a great deal of pressure when negotiating. Adding substance to this comment is a statement expressed by a former Division One player, who replied to a question about whether transferring was a problem for partners as follows:

Even the latest thing with David Unsworth, when he went to Villa, wanting a move back to Everton. The press latched on to the fact that it was his wife who wanted to get back. He denies this but they do have a big say. I mean, a player comes home from training and the wife is moaning that the area is horrible. 'Get me back to wherever' ... What I'm saying is that it has an influence about what the player decides to do with his career. If your home life is not happy then it will affect you. If you're coming home from training and things aren't right, you can't relax. It plays on your mind.

Players and their partners may try to resolve this dilemma by renting or buying a flat, or by arranging for the player to stay with family, close to his new club.

An experienced centre forward, for example, said that he had agreed upon personal terms with a Division One club who were keen to buy him. Whilst there were no problems related to the details of the contract, he said the only remaining problem might have been his wife. He said, 'it was a question of how she would feel. So I rang her and she said, "Yep, okay". We spoke between ourselves about what I was going to do with regards to staying in [the city of my new club]. So it never really got to the stage where I thought I'm not really happy with the arrangements. I was happy with them, it was just a question of whether she was'. The player said that they bought a flat in his new city. When asked whether that made for a settled relationship he replied: 'The biggest thing is moving away. If you've got a young family, the wife's on her own with the little'un and although they maybe don't show it, it can make life a bit of a strain because you're not there a lot. I was only there on a Sunday and that was it. It wasn't ideal'. However, this player, at a later point in the interview, said that in time he became more settled and that, despite his weekly separation from his family, 'I would have liked to have stayed there'. He went on to clarify this point saying that, 'I enjoyed it there. I had a nice flat and my wife used to come up and stay. She used to come a lot so that was good. We would stay the weekends because we had the flat. The people were so nice, everything was okay'. The apparent reluctance on the part of the partners of professional footballers to relocate – in defiance of traditional expectations – may be partially explained by reference, firstly, to the proximity of

social and kin networks and, secondly, to what Gerstel and Gross (1984) refer to as 'the effect of feminism' in their work on commuter marriages.

Social Networks

A number of wives and partners have suggested that that they are unwilling to leave their networks of friends, family and other forms of social support (such as schools and child care) at a time in the history of professional football in which more players are transferring more regularly. Much of the anecdotal evidence provided in the print media indicates that partners find it difficult to leave friends and family, they often experience feelings of isolation, they are burdened with the logistics of relocating, and they struggle to settle in unfamiliar settings. Victoria Margetson, for example, wife of experienced goalkeeper, Martyn Margetson, typifies a number of statements made in interview by the partners of players. She explains her experiences as follows: 'After eight years, Martyn moved to Southend. We were settled in Manchester, so it was very hard. It's not like when other people move. You've only a week to find a house. It was quite hard leaving my friends and family. I felt quite isolated in Southend. I couldn't work because Matthew [their son] was only eight months old and it was hard to meet new people' (*The Mirror*, January 3, 2002). The uncertain circumstances that may quickly materialise for partners can generate a great deal of anxiety, particularly for those already familiar with the initial isolation and 'hassle' that are characteristic of player transfers.

Ann Lee, the wife of former Nottingham Forest player, Jason Lee, for instance, exhibited such anxiety at the prospect of leaving Nottingham, the city in which their family – including three children, two of whom were in schools – were now settled. Interviewed for a television documentary, Ann Lee said: 'I don't know what I'm going to do now. I really do want to stay here, but I also want to be with Jason. I want Jason to come home everyday and that's not going to happen if I stay here ... but Nottingham is where I'd love to bring my kids up' (*Channel Four*, Cutting Edge, November 11, 1997). While the patterns of interaction between the couple are unclear in terms of how they decide upon their future living arrangements, Ann Lee, at a later point in the documentary, informs the interviewer of their final decision. She states: 'The club want Jason to move

nearer Watford. A forty-five minute drive which is understandable. But I really want to live in Nottingham. So he's going to be staying at his mum's in London. He'll definitely be coming home on Sundays, and I hope to think he's going to come home on his days off as well. I don't want to be a single-parent family, but I also want to be happy where I live' (*Channel Four*, Cutting Edge, November 11, 1997). While Ann Lee displayed a strong symbolic attachment to Nottingham as 'a place', her sentiments are arguably better understood in terms of the networks of friends and acquaintances, and preferred schools and childcare options which are tied to familiar locations, and which in turn foster 'rootedness' (Hanson and Pratt, 1995). The rootedness experienced by wives and partners may be augmented by the fact that many struggle to find and maintain friends, due to the fact that their husbands are thought of as public figures. The prospect of having to make new friends is not one relished by many (Webb, 1998). For Jason and Ann Lee, the 'costs' of setting up separate living arrangements are unknown, for this is the first time they have been in a position to make such a decision. Yet it is likely that this is the type of decision that is being reached by increasing numbers of professional footballers and their partners.

A small number of players interviewed for this study mentioned the fact that friendship circles had been an influencing factor both for their partners and for themselves when deliberating about whether or not to commit to certain clubs. For instance, one former centre forward explained that, as a young Division One player, he considered offers from two Division Two clubs simultaneously. He was not playing regularly and he thought he needed to move on. He decided against accepting the offer made by one of the clubs despite their attractive contractual terms; this club was situated, he explained, 'out on a limb'. He clarified this statement as follows: 'It was not necessarily because I would be away from my family, but more from the close knit environment that I'd built up in [my home town]. Not only friends at the football club but the circle of friends that I'd built up outside the football club. I'd also met [my wife] by this time and she has said that if I had signed for [the club in question] we wouldn't be together now. She wouldn't have come with me'. This player signed for a club north of his home town, but still within commuting distance. While the discussion so far has

emphasised social and kin networks by way of explaining decision-making processes, there exist other influences and pressure on players and their partners.

For instance, another pattern was identified by a Division One player who transferred from a club situated in a city in the north of England to one in the home counties where, relatively speaking, the cost of living and, in particular, house prices, are higher. The player explained how economic circumstances constrained him to live the majority of each week away from his wife and children. The following is a short extract from his interview:

> **Player**: I discussed the move with my wife and a lot of people in the game, friends whose opinion I value in the game … I was still living in [my home town] with my wife and family, two kids, and the move to [the southern city] would mean I'd have to stay there during the week and come back up to [my home town] at the weekends.
>
> **MR**: Did your wife consider moving down?
>
> **Player**: No, not at the time. We couldn't afford the house prices. Financially it just wasn't possible.
>
> **MR**: How did you feel about that situation?
>
> **Player**: It wasn't an easy situation. I was constantly travelling between [my home town] and [the southern city]. You know, I hated leaving home on a Monday and couldn't wait to return after games.

After one season, this player moved on to a club in the southwest of England where he was joined by his wife and children. His wife worked as a nurse and she was able to obtain a job at a local hospital relatively easily. This player said that 'you don't often get players' wives who have their own careers'. That said, their dual *earning* partnership, as opposed to a dual *career* one, may have led to relocation being less of an obstacle for this player's wife, who was instantly able to contribute financially to the upkeep of their family.

Social and kin networks operate at local and national levels and must be considered as interdependent in terms of understanding transfer processes. In other words, at a parochial level, domestic and social support and knowledge of local schools, friends and acquaintances and neighbours, may foster 'rootedness'

(Hanson and Pratt, 1995) among family members. Against this backdrop of familiarity and stability, one must consider the (usually) narrow employment market which characterises professional football. Thus, a player may feel constrained to make uneasy career decisions during periods in which he may have few alternative employment options, and few alternative employment skills. For some players, these feelings may be augmented by a heightened sensitivity in terms of equality when negotiating with their partners about the future living arrangements for their family, an orientation which may be explained, in part, in terms of changing balances of power between the sexes.

The Effects of Feminism

It has been suggested already that the reluctance on the part of partners to relocate is demonstrated by the number of examples of players who agreed that they would either travel each day to, or buy or rent a flat in the location of, their new club. This feature arguably provides an indication of a changing balance of power between players and their partners in relation to decision making about whether or not to accept a transfer offer. This pattern may also be a sign of a change in 'attitude' on the part of the partners towards, firstly, their husband's career and, secondly, their own aspirations. These patterns would be consistent with other research which suggests that younger women hold less traditional attitudes to the gendered divisions of labour, both at work and at home (Newell, 1993). A major factor facilitating the decision to commute probably relates in part to the legitimate demands of partners for greater individual freedom and personal choice. However these changes probably relate more to middle-class women than to women from other, particularly lower class, social groups (Newell, 1993). Any analysis of a decision to commute reached by a player and his partner cannot be explained separately from an understanding of the long series of earlier decisions, commitments and experiences from which such resolutions emerge. Thus, one would need to understand more about what Jarvis (1999) refers to as 'the situatedness of household strategies' (p.231); in short, an understanding of time, place and history of household decision-making. The changing balance of power between the sexes in England has had a number of intended and unintended consequences. Two such consequences of relevance here have been an equalising

of household duties and a realisation on the part of women that they can achieve life goals which may be alternative to, or even encompass, traditional expectations in terms of the gendered *divisioning* of labour (Oakley, 1990; Newell, 2000). Therefore, household negotiations and the resultant decisions should be understood in the context of broader social change.

The shifting orientations of players to their work as they experience, for instance, long-term injury, rejection, and changing life circumstances – issues discussed in Chapter Nine – impact on the partners of players as an aspect of their interdependence in which they are bound up. One may question whether, and at what point in her life history, a partner thinks mostly about her husband and his playing career, about her children and their schooling, or about herself and the quality of her life. The job of professional footballer is among a number of occupations in which the workers may be defined as 'public figures'. Being a 'public figure' essentially means being defined in terms of work for the purposes of almost all social contacts (Finch, 1983). And if public figures are 'contaminated' (Banton, 1964) by their work, insofar as they can never really leave their work at the workplace – they are rarely 'off duty' so to speak – it is, in part, also true that their partners experience some of the consequences of being a public figure, but without having been paid to be one. Thus, the partner of a footballer can be defined by his work, and they are both given a vicarious public figure identity. They can never erase what has come to be known as the '*wife of*' identity (Finch, 1983).

This comment is substantiated, in part, by Ann Lee – quoted earlier – who describes succinctly her attempts to develop her own identity and, hence, her self-esteem. Deliberating about 'what she wants out of life' and issues of self-improvement, she states: 'I'm taking Maths and English GCSE which is what I should have done at school, but I tossed it off. But now I need them ... I'd like to be someone, I don't want no dead end job. I think it's about time I put my contribution into this family. I don't want to be known as Jason Lee's wife. I want to be Anne "the whatever". I want to be somebody' (*Channel Four*, Cutting Edge, November 11, 1997). Suzy Barnes, wife of former Liverpool and England international, John Barnes, confirms the sentiments expressed by Ann Lee. She says that when John Barnes was transferred from Watford to Liverpool it was a

very difficult period in which she felt 'very isolated'. She (and their three year old son) moved to Merseyside initially, but then returned South in order to be among 'all my old friends' (p.182). In the following quote, she describes how, over the course of the next two seasons, she managed to develop her 'own life':

> We actually spent two years apart commuting up and down the motorway but in a way it was good as it gave me some space and the chance to develop my own personality. For the first time ever I was on my own, no mum to lean on, no John. Footballers are high maintenance and it's very easy to stay in the background, making preparations, waiting for them to come back home – it can be soul destroying ... But then I turned it round and decided not to spend the time waiting but to see it as my own time ... I developed my own life and John had to fit in with me ... I became so much stronger, more independent (Webb, 1998; p.182).

The sentiments expressed by Ann Lee and Suzy Barnes are, it is suggested, indicative of a change in attitude on their part towards their husbands' work and their own aspirations.

Information relating to other partners included in this section suggests that Ann Lee and Suzy Barnes may not be alone in terms of exercising their 'power' during processes of transferring. As the examples included in this section have indicated, a number of the partners of professional footballers are also coming to decide against relinquishing control over aspects such as their own employment prospects, their lifestyles and, to varying degrees, their personal identities. The ways in which their changing orientations are manifest relates to their perceptions of the legitimacy of their power which they are able to exercise when negotiating about the 'situatedness' (Jarvis, 1999) of living arrangements, particularly when their husbands are either considering, or are in the process of, transferring from one club to another.

Conclusion

The problem addressed in this chapter concerns the relative power of players in relation to the process of transferring. In short, the patterns of interaction among the personnel who are typically involved in transfer processes are identified, in the

first instance against a backcloth of the changing legal regulations of the 'transfer system'. One aspect of this analysis is the changing distribution of power among club directors, managers and players. In addition, this analysis includes club doctors and physiotherapists, as well as the partners of players who are also imbued with a degree of relative power by virtue of their ties to players and to the football clubs. It is clear that some people involved in the course of transfer processes are more powerful than others. Magee (1998) refers to 'exploiters' by which he means the players who are able to use the regulations of the transfer system for their own advantage. Yet, among the networks of relations identified in this chapter, the relative power of players to steer the activities of others may depend on factors such as their age and the work-related reputations they develop. Some players are considered very powerful in the sense that they are in strong negotiating positions, while others may have few, if any, alternative choices. In some circumstances the balance of power appears to be firmly in the hands of the club directors who are able to control the process of transferring largely in terms of their own plans and intentions. However, neither club directors, managers nor players can act arbitrarily or do as they please. All parties bound up in a process of transferring must at least take into account the actions of the others involved; and they must abide – officially at least – by the regulations laid down in the contracts which all parties sign. The people who occupy *central* positions within these networks of relations have power insofar as they are less dependent on specific others, while these others are more dependent on them. Club directors and managers for instance rely on the levels of performance achieved by their players and this in turn can be a means by which they – the players – can exercise a degree of power over their employers. Conversely, club managers can utilise the threat of rejection as a means of exercising power over players who need 'pulling into line'. Thus, an examination of the dynamic balances of power among the network of interdependent relations which characterise professional football – which includes club doctors, physiotherapists and the partners of players – is essential if one is to understand adequately the movement of players from one club to another.

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[1] Magee's categories are applicable only after 1963 and, in particular, following the Bosman Ruling in 1995. Players could not be exploiters prior to 1995 to the same degree as post 1995.
[2] See Chapter Nine for a fuller discussion of the work of Max Weber.

[3] Not all club physiotherapists are qualified to a chartered status and are therefore not members of a professional body. For a fuller discussion of this issue, please refer to Waddington *et al* (1999).

[4] For a general discussion of the roles and responsibilities of club doctors and physiotherapists see Waddington *et al* (1999).

[5] No wives or partners of players were interviewed for this study. Many of the players mentioned their wives in one way or another when discussing household decision-making processes.

[6] For ease of reading, I propose to use the term 'partner' as a generic concept to cover both the wives of players as well as those women (or perhaps men) with whom players co-habit.

[7] This principle was reflected in British law in the concept that prevailed until 1973, that the wife's legal domicile was that of her husband.

[8] Despite the evidence which continues to indicate a clear segregation of women's work, full-time working women and students are found to hold less traditional attitudes, but husbands were repeatedly found to be more traditional than their wives with regard to gender roles at home and work (Newell, 1993).

Chapter Nine

The fate of idealism in professional football

In a chapter entitled 'A Dream Come True', David Conn (1997) discusses the ambitions and lifestyles of modern professional footballers in the 1990s, and he undertakes this task in part by examining the career experiences of Newcastle United and former England international, Alan Shearer. Yet for Conn the title of the chapter is something of an irony. At face value the title implies that for many boys in England, a career as a professional footballer would indeed be perceived as a 'dream' means of making a living. One of the central points of Conn's chapter however is that accompanying the economic and commercial changes that have occurred in the organisation of professional football – increased television and sponsorship deals, player agents, and so forth – there has been an unintended and gradual decline, or even loss of understanding on the part of players, of the meaning of being a 'footballer'. In other words, Conn suggests that it is difficult for contemporary players to keep their dreams alive, and he illustrates this point forcefully in the following way: 'The players are only the symptoms of football's more general loss, commodities simultaneously overpaid and ruthlessly dealt with, in danger of losing their love of the game, loyalty to the club, the bond with supporters' (1997; p.229). Despite Shearer's career achievements, Conn views the experiences of Alan Shearer as a type of 'tragedy'. On the one hand Shearer has been liberated from 'oppression, haggling [and] insecurity at 35' (p.230)[1], but on the other hand Conn suggests that, 'on the day he achieved his childhood ambition [signing for Newcastle United] ... he seemed like he was doing a job. Remembering his media training. Smiling the smile. As if the hard business of realising his dream had, at only 26, removed his capacity to dream at all, replaced it with agents and negotiations and deals and the crisp, dry matter of contract' (p.230).

Conn's analysis is interesting sociologically, for he refers to players as commodities and implies that, wittingly or otherwise, they collude in a process of commodification. This view is echoed by former England international centre-

forward, Les Ferdinand. Interviewed by Conn (1990) about the issue of loyalty shown to professional footballers, Ferdinand remarks that: 'To clubs you're just a commodity ... They'll sell you at the drop of a hat' (p.266). Although Conn is probably wrong to claim that players are overpaid – many of the players interviewed for this study are, or were, paid only modest salaries, for most do not achieve national celebrity status – he is arguably correct to allude to the lack of sincerity displayed when footballers, like Alan Shearer, 'smile the smile'. In a similar manner to C. Wright Mills in his discussion of 'the personality market' (1951), Conn highlights a pattern in which, in the broad context of work, 'the smile' of a footballer could be perceived as 'a commercialised lure' (p.183). Shearer sells his labour, energy and skill to his employers, like all other players, and it could be argued that in addition he sacrifices his 'social personality' to a multitude of customers. Thus, in the course of their work, the 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959) of footballers becomes an instrument employed by them for an alien purpose and, consequently, they engage in a self-estranging process. Calculated displays of feelings in the context of work, such as 'the smile', are probably what Hochschild (1983) had in mind when she discussed the *use value* of emotion work or emotion management. So, while Conn (1997) refers specifically to 'the smile', he does not mention the process through which players, such as Alan Shearer, learn *to use* emotional displays or gain an understanding of the occupational contexts in which they are appropriate. Additionally, Conn fails to ask whether players recognise the part they play in their self-alienation, and what the consequences are for those who continually engage in this type of *instrumental* behaviour.

In his ethnographic doctoral study entitled *Chasing the 'Big-Time'*, Parker (1996) examines the thoughts of young trainees about their 'work'. He describes the way in which various aspects of football apprenticeships lead many of them to realise that the life of a professional footballer is not solely about issues of fame, conspicuous consumption and fortune[2]. He suggests that young players learn quickly about the seriousness of workplace pressures, in contrast to the perceived social, financial and prestigious benefits of careers in football upon which media portrayals tend to focus, and he identifies dimensions of the occupational culture – namely authoritarianism, seriousness and pressure – which serve 'to modify

trainee perceptions of life within professional football' (Parker, 1996, p.95). In short, Parker identifies many occupational practices and demands experienced by trainees to varying degrees, and he likens their overall introduction to the professional game to a process of 'mortification' (Goffman, 1961). Many aspirants however do not progress beyond their apprenticeships to achieve the status of professional player. Only a small number, comparatively speaking, are offered a professional contract.

The problem of how to conceptualise how a player – such as Alan Shearer – can develop from being an individual who *dreams* of success, for whom the professional game could be considered a 'calling', to one who recognises, albeit not in these terms, that he is economically dispensable and that an informal, yet important part of his job is seeming to others to 'love the job', might be addressed by employing aspects of Max Weber's discussion of 'politics as a vocation' (1964). Put simply, Weber suggests that there are two ways of making politics one's vocation, although one might consider a host of other occupations in this vein. He proposes that: 'Either one lives "for" politics or one lives "off" politics' (p.84). Weber does not introduce a false dichotomy here, for he recognises that people who are 'sincere' about their work, at least in the first instance, live both 'for' and 'off' their work in practice, whether or not they recognise this state of affairs. So it could be said that players who live 'for' football, those for whom football provides internal meaning, their occupation – and means of subsistence – is for them a 'central life interest' (Dubin, 1976). Thus the income that derives from their work may not be a central concern in the early phases of their career. Yet, while Shearer may be fulfilling a dream by signing for Newcastle United, the club he supported as a schoolboy, it is Conn's contention that, sooner or later, what counts is 'the crisp, dry matter of contract' (p.230). In other words, the internal change implied by Conn (and Parker) is that in time, players come to realise that football is not solely a route to fortune and celebrity status, but a source of income which will pay a mortgage and provide for their partners and families. On balance, therefore, a player who strives to make the professional game a permanent source of income lives 'off' football. The data collected for this study indicate that the overwhelming majority of players come to recognise *in*

time that they are making a living 'off' football, and come to be less concerned with fulfilling dreams.

The temporal dimension hinted at above is an important aspect of this study because so many of the experiences of professional players (which have been described in the preceding chapters) relate to periods of time in one-way or another; thus the players interviewed for this study talk, in direct and indirect ways, of the time remaining on contracts, certain and uncertain passages of time associated with particular types of injury, periods of time out of the starting line-up, and their age (as a socially constructed category of time), and so forth. All these aspects of the careers of players generate uncertainty in some measure, and this uncertainty may be compounded by factors such as the age of a player or the stage and/or status he reaches in his career. Many of these aspects of uncertainty have been discussed in previous chapters, yet one very important aspect of these examinations of the turning-points in their careers has been relatively absent. In simple terms this aspect can be expressed in the following question: over the course of their careers, what unintended consequences are generated for those players who – often in public contexts – experience, time after time, periods of uncertainty and anxiety in relation to their future as players? In other words, over the course of their careers, do the ups and downs of their existence as professional football players alter the way in which they view football as a profession, and their approach to their careers? In the light of the questions raised, the object of this chapter is to examine the changing orientations of players to their work.

So, the problem addressed in this chapter is to explain how players come to perceive themselves as professionals and how these views, their work perspectives, change through the course of their careers. Many of the players interviewed related their thoughts and feelings to moments in the course of their careers in which they believed they began to gain a clearer understanding of their position and status relative to their contemporaries. So, key or fateful moments in their lives, related directly or indirectly to injuries and contracts, as well as getting married and factors 'external' to their careers such as starting a family, lead players to develop an awareness of the insecurities which are integral aspects of their occupation. For some, this developing awareness coincides with moments

when they feel rejected and unwanted, when their performances, or lack of inclusion in the first team, are publicly acknowledged such that they suffer a loss of self-esteem and experience a diminished sense of self.

Subjective careers

In Chapter Two I examined in some detail a number of studies of particular *occupational* careers, as opposed to 'careers' that are non-work related; for example, 'deviant' careers such as the career of a marijuana user or 'moral' careers. A significant number of these studies consider these occupational careers in an 'objective' sense. In most of these studies, careers are described in *objective* terms as an account of the movement through various stages and contingencies. In other words, the central problem examined in these studies is not directly connected with the personal viewpoints of the people under analysis. The 'objective' career patterns and career lines identified are generally dissociated in any direct way from the personal views of individual people. Yet it was stated in Chapter Two that for some sociologists, significantly Hughes and subsequently Goffman, the concept *career* can refer to more than objective pathways or movements, for it can involve self-identity, and reflect an individual's sense of who they are, who they wish to be, their hopes, dreams, fears and frustrations (Young and Collin, 2000). Thus, studies that attempt to understand the perspective of the people involved, that is, their personal experiences and subjective feelings, often refer – as is noted in Chapter Two – to the concept of career as having both 'objective' and 'subjective' components. On this point, one of the central figures in developing this approach, Everett C Hughes, makes the following remark: 'The career includes not only the processes and sequences of learning the techniques of the occupation but also the progressive perception of the whole system and of possible places in it and the accompanying changes in conceptions of work and of one's self in relation to it' (1958, p.295).

The discussion which is the focus of this chapter therefore deals with the events connected with changes to, or the re-evaluation of, the social identities of professional footballers, and of their changing conceptions of work; in other words, players' feelings about, rather then their formal positions within, the

profession of football and its 'career structure' (although this phrase is slightly ambiguous since there exists in professional football no traditionally defined 'career structural path'). To be more concrete, the focus of the examination concerns the meanings the players interviewed impute to their experiences – and those they witness of other players – in the context of injury and transfers, and what changes these kinds of experiences bring about in terms of their attitudes towards their worlds of work. The blocks of time in which players experience injury or poor form, that is periods when they could be absent from the starting eleven, can be conceptualised as 'passages of vulnerability'. Such passages are times when the players' idealised versions of their careers 'collide' with the realities of internal competition for places and, according to Faulkner (1974), they consequently begin to construct new outlooks and motivations. Stebbins (1970) suggests that the significance of career contingencies or turning points, such as long-term injuries, protracted contract negotiations or even outright rejection, is that they heighten an individual's consciousness of what has happened to them in that particular identity and what may happen in the future. Similarly, for Strauss (1962), turning points in one's developing career occur when one has to take stock, to re-evaluate, revise and re-judge. For Strauss turning points are conceptualised as incidents that may be examined in 'objective' terms but which lead individuals to revise or transform their identities.

It is arguable, therefore, that the way in which footballers experience the particular career contingencies alluded to above may bring them to develop the view, as expressed by Les Ferdinand in the introduction to this chapter that, to their clubs, players are 'just a commodity' (Conn, 1990, p.226). Further to this view, Conn interviews Chris Armstrong, a former playing colleague of Ferdinand at Tottenham Hotspur, who expresses the common opinion that professional football is 'a dream job' (p.229). Yet Armstrong continues his statement suggesting that: 'Some players ... become cynical about the game, looking only for what they can get. With me, if I ever get tired of any aspect of being a footballer, I just think back to working in a factory, and realise that I'm in the best job in the world' (p.229). The notion that someone can consider themselves to be a 'commodity' to be bought and sold in a market economy, and the related idea that in this context a worker is 'looking only for what they can get' – one might recall Conn's

suggestion about the importance of the 'crisp, dry matter of contract' – indicate the possibility of a working environment which produces the conditions of alienation for employees. Thus, while players like Chris Armstrong express a certain degree of satisfaction with their job, other footballers, not unlike other people who wish to earn a living from their creative activities, may regard their capabilities as commodities that are subject to the laws of a commodity economy: in other words, at times football players – Magee (1998) might employ the term 'exploiters' in this respect – quite 'instrumentally' (Cotgrove, 1972) attempt to work the market in which they are bound up in order that they secure employment and achieve 'success' in their own terms.

Marx wrote about the alienation of an individual when he becomes a commodity (Giddens, 1977). For Marx, the alienation of workers in capitalism stems from the commodity-like status of their labour – see Marx (1974), his *magnum opus*, 'Capital'. Marx's analysis in this regard relates to an unavoidable objective state in which all workers (those who sell their labour-power) find themselves. Alienation therefore is not necessarily reflected in job dissatisfaction or in frustration (Watson, 1995). It is clear however that the work undertaken by footballers has complex and dynamic meanings for them, a 'fact' to which the comments of Ferdinand and Armstrong testify. It is argued here that the subjective feelings of players about their work experiences are patterned. For most players achieving success at various career stages in part fulfils dreams and ambitions, yet they can develop a sense of alien-ness in relation to their ego or sense of 'self' when they experience dissatisfaction with their situation. That is, *they* fail as professional footballers to live up to their intentions, expectations and the idealised images they have for themselves.

Players' Feelings

Professional football as a career is, comparatively speaking, short-term, and the labour market for players is highly competitive. Positions of employment are scarce. In the course of their careers players may experience what might be described as repeated lay-offs, work searches – albeit with the assistance of player

agents – and, if successful, a string of employers. In other occupations, particularly since the 1970s (Sennett, 1998), these 'flexible' conditions of work have resulted in a lack of loyalty and the generation of fear and cynicism among workers (Flam, 2002). The interview data collected for this study suggest that, when absent from training and matches for long periods of time, football players develop a *cynicism* in terms of the way in which they feel they are treated by significant others, particularly the manager. A Division One club doctor indicates one likely source of the dissatisfaction and cynicism expressed by players when discussing the precarious nature of the monetary value of players. This doctor described the transfer system as 'a bit like a slave market', particularly when referring to players who sustained or who, wittingly or otherwise, played on with long-term injuries[3].

An established Division Two goalkeeper expressed his feelings towards 'his club' when he experienced problems dealing with medical staff in the course of attempting to find a specialised supportive strapping for his hand; one that was not possible for him to buy, in his words, 'off the peg'. The injury to his hand did not prevent him from playing but, after consulting club medical staff over an extended period, he sought advice from a specialist with whom he made contact on a chance meeting. When asked whether the club were happy for him to seek 'outside' advice in this way, he responded as follows: 'I don't really know, but at the end of the day I do what's best for me and not necessarily what they want me to do. You've got to look after yourself because at the end of the day they don't really look after you. You're just another number within the club'. The idea that it is necessary for players to 'look after themselves' – as alluded to in Chapter Three on occupational culture – is a common theme in this study, and is expressed well in relation to injured players who seek second opinions, as the actions of the keeper quoted above illustrate.

In addition to this idea, however, a number of the players interviewed also expressed their feelings about their sense of self-worth, particularly at uncertain or vulnerable times in their careers. A former Division two player, who subsequently retired from the professional game because of a long-term knee problem, said that 'football is a totally different world to everything else and it's quite a fickle world

as well'. When asked to explain and elaborate on this point again, the player said that whilst rehabilitating from his first long-term injury as a professional, he had been left on his own, day after day, with little supervision. He said, 'I just realised then what professional football was all about. Because you just weren't worth anything. I felt like I didn't matter to the club'. An experienced, former Premier league player expressed this point in more forceful terms. In the course of his interview he described the expectations on players to give 100% at all times, even when carrying injuries, and was in little doubt about his position relative to others in the club. He said: 'People talk about loyalty, but I don't think there's any loyalty in football. Because at the end of the day a club will use you and use you and use you until you're no good to them, and then they'll get someone else. And I'm a believer that a player to a certain extent has got to be the same. He's got to use the club as much as they use him'[4].

This point is confirmed, in part, by an experienced Division One player who claimed to have been treated 'just like a piece of meat'[5], following periods of time in his career when he had been absent from the first team because of poor form or a disabling injury. He emphasised his dissatisfaction by adding that 'you get punished sometimes if you're not in the first team'. This player distances himself as a cause of his non-selection by suggesting implicitly that it was not necessarily his fault he wasn't in the starting line-up; but from his perspective, if it wasn't his fault then *why* was he being punished? When this player was asked to elaborate on the thought that he is treated like *a piece of meat* he made the following lengthy, but pertinent comment:

> The game is so cut throat and there is always someone coming along who will be that bit better than you doing your job. Financial implications dictate that if that person is younger and showing a certain amount of potential then I mean every chairman and every manager will think, 'well if we can pay him half of what we're paying so and so to do it and then we could sell so and so, then we would do it'. And for that reason alone I think most players, perhaps 95% of them are pieces of meat. You are being used to the best of your ability as part of the team but knowing full well that somewhere along the line they're hoping that somebody who has

just come out of an apprenticeship or just signed a young pro contract will be ready for a game. They'll just keep him here and make sure he develops along the right lines and then if they get an offer for me they'll sell me or let my contract expire and pay the younger player half my wages. That to me is how a lot of people think in the game. I've had experiences where I've been used as regards, 'can you play in this position today and we know it's not your normal position but can you just do us the job'. And, again, that's the situation. Yeah, I want to be in the team, of course, but I'm being used by the management for whatever reason in a different position, and against my better judgement. But at least I'm in the team. It's not what you want but, again, you are treated as a piece of meat.

This quote is interesting sociologically for the player makes reference to the 'market' realities for players who are 'ageing' – in a athletic-related biological sense – or, perhaps, not *producing* performances of a desired standard. In essence he talks in terms of the way in which players are vulnerable to others who may be, for example, younger, (potentially) more talented and cheaper. The majority of players interviewed, but particularly older players from all the professional football leagues, referred to themselves in similar ways.

A final, yet highly pertinent description of the way in which players view their self-images at work, sociologically speaking, was offered by an experienced, former Premier league player, who was asked about the advice he received from club medical personnel during a period in which he was playing with an injury to his foot. When asked about the use of pain-killing injections, and whether or not players were able to refuse them, he made the following point:

I think every player should have the opportunity to say, 'well, to be honest with you, I appreciate what your saying but its not good enough', and [the medical staff and management] should respect that as well. It's fair for them to say to you that this is the only way you're going to get fit, 'we need to dissolve the bit of tissue that's giving you problems'. But I think players tend to get treated as just a commodity. You're just part of the club.

When asked whether this was a common thought among players he replied: 'Oh, I think every footballer's a commodity. I'm not saying we all feel like it in the sense of you're player A, you're player B, but I still think when push comes to shove you're a commodity and basically the club want as much as they can out of that commodity'.

To summarize thus far, the players interviewed referred to themselves as "commodities", "pieces of meat", and as "just another number". Wacquant (2001) refers to 'the language of exploitation' in order to describe boxers' consciousness of the way they are undervalued and manipulated. But how do football players come to develop this view of themselves, of other players, and of their own sense of self-worth? Can a player who considers himself to be *a commodity*, or who thinks he is treated like *a piece of meat* by his employers, really be satisfied with or fulfilled by his work? Why would someone wish to pursue a career feeling that they are being used, in a profession for which they originally possess aspirations of 'achieved celebrity', financial reward and public acclaim? The following discussion may help to shed light on these questions.

Orientations to Work in Professional Football

It will be argued here that footballers begin their professional lives with idealistic dreams of success which, sooner or later, are replaced by more realistic outlooks. Many of the players interviewed for this study spoke of the way in which their status changed within the club, and from club to club, as they became more established and experienced. This working hypothesis is similar in kind to developments observable in other occupations, for example, the military and the medical profession. The fate of idealism has been well documented sociologically (Becker and Geer, 1958), yet evidence of such adjustments to the realities of work for professional footballers, that is, the divesting of certain preconceived attitudes and expectations, have only recently started coming to light (principally in the work of Parker, 1996). In the case of football, the process for players of coming to terms with the realities of day-to-day work life should not be confined, as they

have tended to be thus far, to studies of apprenticeships and occupational socialization. Understood as an important career contingency, for example, injury provides regular periods of time throughout the playing career, when players are constrained to step out of the firing line, to watch and to reflect on their present and future circumstances.

A Division One club captain provides a good example of a player enforced to reflect upon his status in work. This experienced player said that he was referred to a hospital by his club doctor with an infection which had resulted from a bad gash to his leg, sustained whilst playing. Having gone into hospital thinking initially that he would need fresh stitches, a tetanus jab or some antibiotics, he was unexpectedly admitted for two weeks with a serious case of blood poisoning. Throughout his stay in hospital he received only one visit from the club physiotherapist; his only other visitors were his wife and children. Neither the club doctor nor manager nor other team members attempted to make contact with him through this time. He was, in his terms, justifiably 'pissed off'. And it was during this period in which he claims to have realised his status within the club, his value to the manager and, in simple terms, who cared about him. This player resented the way he was treated by the club's physiotherapist, in particular. As club captain he expected to receive some personal attention, if only, one suspects, in order to reduce his feelings of isolation; he assumed that a player of his status would be missed. Yet in the following quote the player describes vividly the circumstances of, and his feelings about, his hospitalisation. He said:

> I had my illness. I'm in hospital right, on antibiotics every 4 hours. Massive dosages, right. It took [the physiotherapist] two weeks to find out that I was nearly dead. He never rang me. A week went by and I'm thinking he hadn't been in to see me. No, actually, he'd been in once because it's on his way home. He wasn't there purposefully to check how I was. One of the other lads had just had an operation so he popped in at the same time. He never came purposefully to see me. It really pissed me off. And then I never saw him again. I was in hospital nearly two weeks and on the Friday they allowed me to come out for a couple of hours, so I rang him up and said, 'look, I'm going home for a couple of hours. I didn't

want you to have any wasted journeys'. So he said, 'I was planning to come across to see you'. But I didn't believe him. He didn't come to see me. It was a case of out of sight out of mind. That's how a lot of us have felt with him. A week later I said to the club doctor, 'have you told the manager how serious this is', and he had to go and tell him. He said to [the manager], 'look you had better realise that [the player] will not play for another 3 months, he is seriously ill'. Still, to this day, I would like to know if the manager knew exactly what happened.

It is not unusual for players to be sidelined for such an extended period. It is clear however that during his stay in hospital and subsequent convalescence, this player reflects on the treatment he receives from the club physiotherapist, and the degree to which the club manager misses his playing services. The player expresses the concern that someone should know that he is 'nearly dead'; for someone to express this concern is an acknowledgement that he is missed and that significant people – most importantly, for him, the team manager – have concerns about his state of health. Even though he cannot be *where the action is*, he still wants to feel needed. He is having to manage undesired feelings of isolation about his situation for he cannot contribute in a meaningful way either to his sense of self as a player, to his employers, or to the wider community associated with the club. For the player this need to feel wanted is expressed most clearly in the concern displayed by others about his condition. The quote is significant therefore because the player expresses dissatisfaction at an aspect of his work related to a particular period in time in which he experiences heightened vulnerability. It is typical of an experience that may be considered a 'triggering event' (Flam, 2002). In other words, it is the type of experience which may trigger in a player a change of orientation to his work and, consequently, a changing view of himself 'at work'.

The player quoted is clearly unsatisfied with the physiotherapist, yet one could neither make the same assumption about the way this player feels about other members of the club, e.g., the team manager or his playing colleagues, nor about his level of satisfaction as a professional footballer. The degree of satisfaction expressed by workers in relation to the part they play in terms of 'production', and their need to be considered by others to be an important part of these processes,

has been given some attention by sociologists (see, for example, Blauner, 1960; Dubin, et at, 1976; Scase and Goffee, 1989). To consider oneself an important part of a team, albeit a team of workers who bake bread, build houses or drill for oil and so forth, is one of many sources of meaning for employees: professional footballers are no exception in this connection – as explained in Chapters Three and Six. In many of the early studies concerning 'satisfaction at work' (Blauner, 1960) it is acknowledged that the choices that people make about their occupation presuppose at least a minimal understanding on the part of the employee of likely sources of satisfaction as well as possible deprivations. Footballers understand too that the satisfactions to be derived from the professional game can be enormous in relation to, for example, occupational prestige and financial reward, yet their orientation to their job can change over the course of time as they experience work-related deprivations. The following interview extract concerns a former Premier league centre-back who was asked about whether or not he still worried about gaining a new contract in a fashion similar to inexperienced players. In his reply he focuses attention on what he describes as his changing 'outlook'. He said:

> **Player**: It's not the same. I think your outlook changes. I mean the way I look at things in general has changed a lot, and I've learnt a lot from things that have happened to me, like the experience at [a former club]. I wouldn't change it particularly, I've learnt a lot from it. Your whole outlook on life really as much as anything else changes from your experiences. I'd go home after games and I would worry too much about it, particularly at times when we were struggling. If it affected the club then it affected me, but I've sort of learnt to distance myself a little bit now. It's my job and I do it to the best of my abilities.
>
> **MR**: Do you consider it an enjoyable job?
>
> **Player**: I wouldn't swap it for the world, definitely. I think people view it as 'oh, you're a footballer, it must be fantastic', and it is. But there are down sides to it as well. If you had to weigh up the whole thing, I don't think you'd talk to many footballers who would swap their lives.
>
> **MR**: Down sides such as?
>
> **Player**: Well obviously there are the constant injuries. And last season I was getting abuse and the crowd was hammering me. There's not a better

feeling than getting 30,000 people cheering you on, but there's not much of a worse feeling than when 30,000 people are booing you. You go home and think, 'Oh, what's going on here. Do I need this?' You start wondering whether you are doing the right thing. How you can change things? Then you worry too much. That's what I end up doing and it makes things worse rather than better.

This former Premier League player expresses the view that one's orientation or 'outlook', to use his words, changes as one experiences turning-points in one's career – a turning-point or *triggering event* such as the one described by the player above who felt abandoned in hospital. This view is consistent with research undertaken on careers in a vast range of occupations (see, for example, Collin, 2000; and Sennett, 1998). Over the course of his experiences the player learns to 'distance' himself such that he begins to perceive his work as a professional footballer more in terms of a 'job' rather than, for example, a *calling* or *vocation*. In other words, the player comes to the understanding that he is playing, and therefore living, by-and-large, 'off' football. While he claims to be satisfied with his career choice, as indicated by his comment that few footballers would 'swap their lives', he goes on to provide contrasting examples of work satisfaction and deprivation. He learns how to 'distance' or detach his feelings in the course of experiencing the deprivations to which he makes mention. Thus, one can argue that the attitudes of players to their work are more complex than a crude satisfaction/dissatisfaction dichotomy suggests. Attitudes to work are multifaceted in professional football.

A Division Three player also responds to a question in a way such that the complexities of workplace orientations are highlighted. When asked about the joking culture within the club and how this affects players who are injured long-term, he replied as follows: 'Players who are out injured tend to be quite cynical in their approach. I suppose deep down I enjoy my football so much that I'm not that cynical about the game myself'. The player was then reminded that, notwithstanding his remarks, he had described himself at an earlier point in the interview as 'a piece of meat'. In response to this point he made the following comment:

Yes, you are, but I think I've accepted that to a certain extent. I mean very much for the last year and a half I've been in and out of the first team, playing Saturday, not playing Tuesday but in the Reserves Wednesday. And to a certain extent everything that goes on in my life outside of football at the moment is brilliant really. I'm in an area where I want to be living, the children are settled, my wife's settled. I'm doing all the things I want to do. There's a five percent gap that's just missing. If [my club] played the style of football that I hoped they would, and I was banging in twenty goals a season, then the whole 100% of my life would be hunky dory. Well at times I am a bit cynical about the situation here but I never turn round and say anything. I just carry on and think I am earning the sort of money I hoped I would earn when I was a kid.

Of great interest sociologically is the fact that the player suggests that to a certain extent he has come to accept that he is, and will be treated as, 'a piece of meat'. He would 'never turn round and say anything', for the cultural values of professional football – as described in Chapter Three – require players to hide their resentments and anxieties behind a demeanour of enthusiasm for the job. In the social context of the club he needs to show to significant others that, even though he knows that the manager may treat him like *a piece of meat*, he still 'loves the job'. For the sake of his reputation as a player, it is incumbent on him to continue to display the characteristics of a 'good professional attitude', despite the levels of 'spiritually demanding play acting' (Terkel, 1975) this behaviour may require.

To come to this type of view requires this player to 'distance' or detach himself from his experiences, and to gain a clearer understanding of them. One might suggest therefore that in the course of their careers players come to be *resigned* to the fact that they must behave in this manner. Rather than attempting to examine the levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by players – a task to which sociological questions have been raised in terms of reliability and validity (see Fox, 1980; Parker, 1977) – it is clear, based on data collected for this study, that the orientations of players change, sometimes considerably, during their

careers. Reflecting many of the worker satisfaction studies (which report general levels of satisfaction allied with outbursts of resentment, hostility, apathy and an acceptance of working arrangements and colleagues) players display complex and dynamic orientations to their work; and from time to time they question their own belief in the part they play in the production processes in professional football in which they are, albeit temporarily, bound. Many players possess mixed feelings about their work and the evidence presented thus far may, to some degree, be a consequence of their acquiescence or resignation, rather than dissatisfaction in response to work-place deprivation. The prevalence of hostility and resentment about the way in which they are treated on a personal level by certain individuals, as expressed in the statements offered by them in interview, testifies to the survival of some conception of what work could be like for them. Yet, in time, unrealistic aspirations are limited and players develop 'outlooks' in which they are resigned to accept, however grudgingly, their work-related experiences. It also requires on their part an acceptance that the occupational aspirations they may once have harboured are unlikely to be fulfilled and that it is necessary for them to readjust their sights. The social circumstances described by players, and their attempts to sustain positive self-images as players, may lead them to regard their job as little more than a source of income.

Playing 'off' football

In probing the attitudes to work possessed by football players one must consider also the expectations which other people have of them. Player attitudes to their work cannot be treated in a narrow economically oriented manner. Exploitative relations at work extend, and have implications for people other than the player, beyond the workplace itself. As has been explained elsewhere – Chapter Three – the orientations of footballers are not understandable simply in terms of structural factors within the professional game, such as the high levels of competition for places among club colleagues. The attitudes of players arise and change among interdependencies with people, many of whom are not employed in a direct capacity within a football club. Many of the players interviewed for this study referred to circumstances *external* to the football club as being of central importance in terms of influencing their approach to work. For example, the wives

and partners of players, as well as other family members, may have a strong bearing on the perspective a player adopts at any given time. An experienced Division Three player who, at an earlier point in his interview, had discussed his initial career aspirations and dreams, provides an indication of such 'outside' issues. When asked to comment further about whether he felt the lives of footballers are glamorous he replied as follows:

> I would say that if you play at the very, very top it is glamorous. I have played at two clubs where it has been quite glamorous ... those dreams I had of having a nice car, walking down the street and being recognised only happened at two clubs ... so I think I've seen both sides of the coin. I won't deny that at times it has been glamorous, but the be-all and end-all for me at the level I play at now is that I can pay the mortgage, drive a nice car, live in a nice house, and there's food on the table for the two kids. Those are the simple facts.

It is argued here that the orientation to his work developed by this player over the course of his career is indicative of an 'instrumental' approach (Watson, 1995), for the player recognises that he is undertaking his work in order to meet on balance the needs of his dependents rather than to experience the intrinsic fulfilments which may be gained from this type of employment. The 'simple facts' equate therefore to economic necessities.

Ideas of instrumentality were initially given credibility in the work of Goldthorpe and Lockwood *et al* (1968)[6] who focused on the motives, interests and outside work 'backgrounds' of the manual workers in their study of social class in Britain. For Goldthorpe and his colleagues a Weberian ideal type instrumental orientation to work is characterised by workers who are calculative in terms of their 'involvement', who view their work as a means of earning income, and for whom work is not a source of self-realisation. These characteristics are present to some degree in a number of the statements given by the players in interviews for this study. Unlike the workers examined by Goldthorpe *et al* (1968)[7], however, the players interviewed for this study cannot be said to have chosen professional football as a career for mostly 'extrinsic', rather than 'intrinsic', reasons. That is,

the car workers who were the research focus in Goldthorpe *et al* brought intrinsic orientations with them to the workplace, whereas footballers begin their working life 'chasing the big time' (Parker, 1996): players are unlikely to have considered employment as a footballer as a means to an end and as a way to seek fulfilment *outside* work. Whatever motives players may harbour for seeking a career as a footballer – for example, creative fulfilment, fame and celebrity status and conspicuous consumption – they nevertheless make important accommodations and adjustments to their orientations once in work, as their experiences are influenced by structural factors such as employer-employee power relations, internal competition for places, constant injuries, their vulnerability to rejection and the inescapable threat of ageing.

A good example of the way the personal 'outlook' of a footballer may come to be transformed is provided by an experienced Division Three player who had played in all of the football league divisions during his career. In the following extracts the player, who at the time of his interview was injured, discusses whether or not he would play in future matches carrying this injury. He pointed out that when he initially sustained the injury he knew that he could have carried on playing: 'But I've learnt from *that time* that, if I don't feel 100% then I don't play in a game. It is a simple as that. If I've got a slight niggle then I say no'. In the following quote this player refers to 'that time' by way of explaining his thought processes in such situations and, consequently, reveals something of his orientation to his work. So, when asked why he is taking a risk by exaggerating the full extent of the discomfort he is feeling (by not playing with a soft tissue injury which is the expected convention) he said:

> Yes, but I think that is a referral to what I went through when I had to play two weeks with a broken toe basically. And I think that is one of the things about growing up in football; you realise sooner or later that you are only a piece of meat, certainly at the levels I play at. They ask you to do specific jobs, and say, 'Oh look, I know you've been struggling all week, but can you do this for us and can you do that', and when you are young and naïve you do it, and when you get a bit older and a bit wiser you think, 'hold on,

I'm putting myself on the line here. No, I'm not going to risk the last five years of my career for the sake of one game'.

When asked whether it is a regular occurrence for players to be asked to play out of position and at times when they may be 'struggling' with an injury, he made the following point:

> I think it is a regular occurrence for younger players. As I've got older and wiser I've been able to say, 'no, I'm not risking it', just for the sake of one game. If I rest myself for this weekend, then by the beginning of next week I'll be as right as rain for the next one. One game, that's all. One game during a career of 400 league games isn't a lot, is it! But I think people are put under certain pressure when they are younger, but when they get older I don't think it happens so much. You've learnt to make up your own mind and make your own decisions then.

Like other players, whose views have been presented in this chapter, this player recognises that exploitation is an inescapable fact of his career. As such, working under the relational pressures imposed by structural constraints, each player must *make do* as best he can. Wacquant makes a similar point in his highly relevant work on boxers. In a piece on the way boxers think and feel about their trade he remarks that boxing as a career, 'is shot through with ambivalence and disquietude, even resentment in some quarters. For it is laced with the barely repressed, yet also embodied, knowledge of the dark side of pugilism, what one Chicago pug ... calls the "barbaricness" of the sport: the "daily grind" and "torture" that one has to go through in preparation for a fight; the physical abuse that can "make scrambled eggs outa your brains" ... the ruthless exploitation that spontaneously brings forth vituperative analogies with slavery and prostitution ... and threatens to reduce you to a "piece of meat" ' (Wacquant, 1995, p.520). In similar vein to the boxers examined by Wacquant (1995 and 2001), professional footballers come to varying degrees to acquiesce in the exploitative arrangements in which they are bound. On the one hand, therefore, the player quoted above recognises that he will be treated like a piece of meat, yet on the other he is able to consider what in *his* terms is the most rational and appropriate way he can resolve

the injury-related dilemma with which he is faced. He resolves his problem by taking a risk by not playing with a soft tissue injury and vacating his position in the starting eleven, although he must do this by appearing to his 'critical audience' (Kotarba, 1983) to be unable to play because of pain. He is caught between his ambivalence of the necessity to identify with an occupational culture in which he does not completely believe – one which espouses loyalty to, and (bodily) sacrifice for the greater good of, the team – and a perception of the fact that he must *instrumentally* pursue his own ends if he is to be 'successful'.

Resembling the workers examined in Kunda's (1992) study, who saw themselves as 'playing a game' in terms of their appearance and behaviour in the context of work, the players interviewed for this study have few choices other than to appear devoted to the team and to the 'goals' of their management, or at least they must conform to the norms of the work culture, in order to avoid punishment, discrediting or outright rejection. The upshot however of the continual need for players to manipulate their feelings and actions in order to 'play the game' of being a loyal team member, is the production over time of an instrumental individualism (Ezzy, 2001) towards their work[8]. Thus, it is argued here that a club manager or director's pursuit of 'success' requires the sacrifice of self-respect of their players, as the players imply in their comments, yet they require team members to devote themselves to the pursuit of their – that is the manager's – formulation of what constitutes 'success'. The occupational culture of players – central to which is what is known as a 'good attitude' – is a normative form of social control that is, and has been, 'engineered' (Ezzy, 2001) by directors and managers in order to reduce the ability of players to choose anything other than dedication to the team, even if this requires 'deep acting' (Goffman, 1959) as players mature and gain playing experience. Players who display a 'good attitude' are led to believe that they will be rewarded, even if this is only an image of trust and community which, in time, they begin to see through – and become *cynical* towards. In response, players develop an instrumentalism in which they are constrained to 'play the game' of a simulated togetherness to further their own interests (Grey, 1994; Casey, 1995). For some players their 'interests' relate directly to maximising their earnings and building their reputations among their

developing social networks as good professionals, while for others it may be securing a future contract and avoiding unemployment[9].

The way in which a player may demonstrate, albeit implicitly, an instrumental orientation to their work is most often via their actions in relation to, for example, injury and rejection from the team, as explained by a number of players quoted in this chapter. Their behaviour is understandable in terms of an acute appreciation of their position as professional footballers in the labour market (although aspects of their understanding are also acquired when viewing other playing colleagues' experience key or fateful moments). In other words, players develop, usually at times of crisis in their lives, an understanding of their position relative to other players in terms of their reputations and also the 'simple facts' concerning economic necessities. Unlike other studies concerning attitudes to work that have focused and laid emphasis on the links between developing technologies and instrumental attitudes (Goldthorpe *et al*, 1968), this study confirms that the changes to which players become alerted are 'subjective' in nature. Players recognise that they are vulnerable to career contingencies and that they are, in fact, economically dispensable. The competitive nature of the labour market is therefore an important feature of the occupation that underpins the instrumental individualist orientations adopted by professional footballers over the course of their careers.

A former Division One defender who was then playing in Division Three articulated an example of the way players express their feelings about the vulnerability of their market position. In the course of discussing the way players negotiate with managers and directors about the terms of their contracts, even though now many may negotiate through a player agent, he made the following remarks:

> You become a bit more hardened to discussing contract terms and things like that, you know. But in the early stages I just wanted to play football, I wasn't bothered about the money really. A couple of years later when you've played a lot of football, money becomes a lot more important because, you know, you are buying a house and you've got a girlfriend or

wife or whatever. So it's income you want really rather than just any sort of playing experience.

This player was then asked to expand on the suggestion that he changed his view knowingly to a position in which playing football wasn't the be-all-and-end-all, and that money had become, to use his terms, 'a lot more important'. At this moment the interviewer took the value-laden position of someone who *naturally* assumed – in a manner similar to that of David Conn referred to at the beginning of this chapter – that players play for the *love of the game*. The following lengthy interview extract concerns the responses of this player to this suggestion:

> **Player**: I think in football you have to be single minded. Nobody else looks after you, and you know you hear ... stories about players being, well it happened to me at [a former club] actually. There was this player there who'd been there seven years, played 350 games for the club, a new manager took over, who had previously been the coach and, I think the week before transfer deadline date, he gave him two weeks wages. He'd been on non-contract for about two years because he couldn't agree a contract and in that time the club had gone from the fourth division into the new first division. But he was still on the same money as he was when the team was in the fourth division. I think they gave him two weeks wages a week before deadline day and told him that was it, when he'd, you know, he'd been a regular for sort of seven years and that was it, 'on yer bike'. So you've got to look after number one. There comes a point when you are a bit younger obviously when you just want to be a footballer, but when you've been a footballer for a while you realise, you know, that it is a job and you've got to maximise your earnings as much as you can. It probably comes with growing up as well when you start making commitments and you have to start thinking about mortgages and wives and children and things.
>
> **MR**: Are such stories common in your opinion?
>
> **Player**: Yes, I think every player has probably, well, as I said before, every player probably has gone through it or seen somebody go through it. I think you realise that, you know, it could be you in that situation ... I think

players can get cynical and bitter, I think a lot of players are very cynical and bitter especially as they get older. I mean they know that the younger players come in a bit starry eyed, probably like I was, and then you start to realise that it is not about England caps and Wembley appearances and that it is a job and you've got to pay the mortgage like anyone else.

MR: So, is the need to pay the mortgage, and presumably the need to meet other *living* costs, the root of the pressure for players?

Player: Yes definitely. I think football must be a wonderful job if you are earning 10,000 pounds a week like a lot of these Premiership players are, but as you drop down the leagues … once you've signed a contract there's a sort of honeymoon period really where everything is nice and you've got two years ahead of you, guaranteed money and everything. But then six months into that you think well this time next year I'm starting to panic about another contract, particularly if you are not in the team. I mean if you are in the first year of your contract and you don't play well or if you are not in the team you start to think well, I've got this season. But if I'm not in the team at the start of the next season, you know, it's … so that's where the pressure comes you know its just constantly thinking about what's your next contract or if not where's the next club coming from.

This player makes a number of interesting points including his awareness of the lack of loyalty shown to players and the need, therefore, for players to look after themselves. He refers also to the belief that players become cynical about their status; in particular they recognise their vulnerability in terms of securing future playing contracts[10]. In effect, this player articulates a fear of job loss. But whilst he isolates his explanations of his *instrumental* actions in relation to economic necessities such as paying the mortgage, his single-mindedness cannot be understood purely in terms of rational economic thinking on his part. Sociologically his work perspective must be understood as embedded in wider networks of social relations. Even if players feel confident about securing their next contract, they can still worry about the prospect of losing it as a result of injury or other contingencies such as a change in management; the loss of self associated with redundancy is particularly hard for players to sustain. Thus, the work perceptions of players are shaped by both the potential threat, and the actual

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consequences, of job loss. All players therefore generate insecurities during passages of vulnerability in their careers. Their insecurities relate directly to, but can also be independent of, the workplace, and are associated with personal circumstances (or risk factors) including ageing, the lack of transferable or alternative employment skills, and responsibility for dependents.

A player, now retired, who played for clubs in all divisions except the Premier League, spoke in his interview of a developing realisation concerning his initial career aspirations. In the course of detailing the events that concerned the re-negotiation of an existing contract, and the anxieties that result from protracted contract negotiations, he makes the following comments: 'I really had nothing left to play for to be honest, and so I thought well maybe this was the time, you know, to go off in a different direction. I've been playing professional football for about ... the last fifteen years and you get to about thirty and you realise that you are never going to be a millionaire or play for Manchester United and all that. I've got the brains to go on and do something else'. He was asked to comment further about whether or not he still clung to the 'self-serving notion' (Wacquant, 2001, p.189) that he will be the ageing footballer who beats the odds by getting spotted and making a 'big move'; the type of idealised thoughts he may have harboured as a young player. In response he said:

> I think every player playing in the lower divisions, you know, secretly yearns for the big move, but it doesn't come to many. That's the thing. But the older you get the less likely it is, if it's going to happen at all. Plus the loyalty shown to players at smaller clubs is non-existent really, so you can play 200 games in four years and the club will say, 'thanks a lot'. From the point of view of the club it's just an opportunity to get somebody off the wage bill and, you know, you are on the dole. I wasn't prepared to get myself in that situation where I could get pushed out at anytime. I'd rather sort of jump before I was pushed basically.

Experiences such as these, and others which have been referred to in the course of this study, lead players to develop a heightened sense of self-worth, and a more reality-congruent understanding of their status among colleagues. It is clear that

career contingencies such as injuries, especially long-term injuries, changes in management, transferring to other teams and so forth, can be significant turning points in the careers of players in which, earlier or later, an emerging realism and cynicism develops. Players learn during times absent from training and playing that *time* is paramount and internal colleague competition is intense.

To summarise: players develop instrumental attitudes towards their work such that they enable themselves either to achieve 'success' in terms of playing reputation or to satisfy their personal interests in relation to the future economic security of dependents. Attending to their 'interests', whichever way this term may be defined, may constrain players to think (and very occasionally to act) in a way that is at odds with the image of a 'good professional'. Yet players feel *morally* justified in adopting such work perspectives for they become cynical towards their employers who they come in time to believe will not reward their efforts with genuine displays of loyalty. Whilst 'the management' within a professional football club may attempt to foster an image of community among their employees – the players – the occupational culture in which all players work constrains their choices of action and leads to the development of a sense of individualism that results in an increasing neglect for any other people outside the players' immediate sphere of concern; in other words, genuine respect players may have for colleagues is devalued.

Cynicism as resistance?

In this chapter a social pattern has been identified concerning how players develop a degree of cynicism towards professional football and come to adopt instrumental attitudes towards managing the social relations in which they are bound up at work. Apart from direct references to cynicism, perhaps the most obvious indication of this pattern is that players refer to themselves as 'pieces of meat' and 'commodities'. As the data presented in this chapter suggest, player cynicism results from circumstances in which they feel let down either because initially they believed, and were committed to the idea, that they were involved in a career that would lead to personal wealth and glory; or they developed a lack of trust in relation to the motives of people for whom they are *expected* to labour using their

greatest efforts by virtue of their occupational position, and from whom they expect a commensurate reward; or they lose their belief in, or develop a contempt for, the part they are asked to play in the *production* process. The way in which professional footballers come to think cynically about their work is no different in kind to the way many people generate contempt for, or how they begin to 'see through', a set of beliefs – for example an occupational culture – to which formerly they have been willingly committed.

At first glance, the idea that footballers can be disenchanted by, and cynically detached towards, their profession is somewhat surprising, for the occupation of professional football provides a context – an opportunity – for certain males 'blessed' with special talents to construct a publicly recognised heroic or 'glorified self' (Adler and Adler, 1991), and escape a common humdrum working life the like of which bears down on the majority of 'ordinary' people. Sociologists interested in employees and their work have typically focused on manual and factory workers because, it seems, they are the people who might well consider their work to be unrewarding in terms of emotional gratification and are, therefore, less likely to think of it as a 'central life interest' (Dubin, 1956). In contrast, it is a widely held assumption that a career as a professional footballer is infused with a sense of value, excitement and accomplishment – remember, for instance, David Conn who describes a career as a footballer as 'a dream come true'. Professional football is a highly skilled (manual) activity to which a highly distinctive value is attached. The lives of players are imbued with a great deal of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1992) and like singing and dancing and similar 'body-centred performance trades that occupy a pivotal place in working class culture' (Wacquant, 1995, p.509), football talent is considered by many fans to be a 'sacred gift' whose possession carries with it moral obligation to nurture and use it well; in short, a narrative typical of this moral obligation might suggest that in light of the fact that *anyone* can pick up a job in a factory, players *should not* waste the opportunity bestowed 'on them' by failing to realise their talent.

Despite these very general and for the most part mythical, yet well-understood statements[11], cynicism, and expressions of cynicism, were regularly articulated in the narratives of players interviewed for this study. One might conclude from

these data that players are cynically enlightened about the *realities* of football culture but they act – or feel constrained to act – as if they are not. There is a body of sociological literature that evaluates various interpretations of employee cynicism (see, for example, Anderson, 1996; Casey, 1995; Collinson, 1992; du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993). Despite the fact that 'cynicism' has been discussed sociologically for some time – Simmel, for example, suggested that cynicism is an emotional screen or 'psychic response' to modernity (Shilling, 2002) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to the notion of 'cool alternation' by way of explaining the response where individuals subjectively 'distance' themselves from the roles they play – this recent literature, which mostly focuses on the subjectivities of workers, highlights examples of cynicism in 'modern' workplaces and draws attention to employee orientations to work that, in a number of respects, resemble those identified in this chapter. The literature on employee cynicism can be categorized, perhaps over simplistically, into three broad groups. The first category, which will not be considered analytically in this study, contains 'managerialist' work that views cynicism as a psychological defect that needs to be 'corrected' (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). However, the two remaining categories of research that are pertinent for the purposes of understanding player cynicism differ fundamentally on how this cynicism is interpreted.

The first argument identifies the cynicism characteristic of employees as a practice of dissent and a subtle way of resisting control by *dis-identifying* with contemporary occupational culture whilst concurrently complying with it. Fleming and Spicer (2003) who advocate this view suggest that in the new age of post-Fordist corporate culture employees are 'working at a cynical distance' (p.157). In addition to approaches that view employee cynicism as a defence mechanism that attempts to block the 'colonisation' (Casey, 1995) of the identities of workers – that is, mechanisms that protect their 'back stage' selves – Fleming and Spicer (2003) argue that 'when the dis-identification process is enacted it can establish an alluring "breathing space" where people feel untrammelled by the subjective demands of the organisation, but which ironically permits them to behave as an efficient and meticulous member of the team nevertheless' (p 167). In other words, it would be their likely suggestion that the footballers interviewed for this

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study come to 'see through', and dis-identify with, the rhetoric of a 'good professional attitude' as an occupational cultural ideology, yet, even so, they still engage in behaviour through which it is supported and reproduced. Fleming and Spicer (2003) argue that a process of *cynical* dis-identification is a more subtle form of resistance that raises sociological questions about 'power' and 'subjectivity' in the workplace.

The second and dominant (Fleming and Spicer, 2003) argument is characterised by an alternative perspective on this ambiguous point of debate. Sociologists Willmott (1993) and du Gay and Salaman (1992), for example, suggest that even though workers may negatively distance themselves from the dictates of the occupational cultures in which they are embedded, and work hard to dis-identify mentally with their prescribed social roles, their (contradictory) behaviour can be understood as *simple conformity*. This line of argument therefore purports that cynicism as an unplanned awakening for players unobtrusively reproduces relations of power because cynical employees allow themselves to think (falsely) that they operate as autonomous agents, but they still practise the 'cultural' rituals regardless. As an audience viewing 'front stage' performances (Goffman, 1959), sociologists such as Willmott and du Gay and Salaman would argue that the behaviour of professional footballers would appear to reproduce the very occupational culture – the 'good attitude' – that is, and has been, impressed upon them in part by club managers and coaches whose motives in their eyes are questionable and with whom some have lost faith[12]. Thus, cynical detachment as a tactic of transgression does not appear to alter or challenge existing power structures, for players become 'trapped' over the course of their careers in a 'vicious circle of cynicism and dependence' (Willmott, 1993, p. 518).

The interpretations of employee cynicism put forward discuss the same general trend: that in contemporary working life managerial ideology targets the very 'selves' of employees (Fleming and Sewell, 2002) who, in response, engage in an *active disengagement*. Thus, the footballers interviewed could be identified on the one hand as complying with cultural norms without conforming to them, or on the other hand as developing a false sense of autonomy that embeds them more

profoundly to existing relations of power. The data obtained for this study indicate that both interpretations offer explanatory purchase. The cynical perspectives that footballers come to adopt can be interpreted as a recognition of the fact that they see through the rhetoric and motivations of managers, enabling them to act in a manner that they believe is for their own good; that is, they act 'instrumentally'. Furthermore, the development of a cynical frame of mind towards their employers is a form of self-serving 'power' since they can be sceptical about, rather than blind to, the motives of other people and, in their own minds, acquire a more realistic understanding – a 'knowledge' – of what the circumstances in which they are embedded 'really mean' for them. Invoking the work of W.I. Thomas (see Bottomore and Nisbet, 1979), knowledge of their circumstances is meaningful since the subsequent *informed* actions of players have intended and unintended consequences for people involved directly and indirectly with football club business. In this sense, cynicism can be conceptualised a form of resistance against both the authoritarian and normative forms of control which constrain, at least on the surface, their actions and presentation of self.

It can be argued that both interpretations presented in this conclusion are relevant because they offer insight in terms of how the players in this study come to think and feel about their work. The cynicism of players remains incomprehensible however without an examination of the interdependencies in which they are tied. In an effort to be more concrete, there are numerous references in the chapters concerning injury in which, for example, players exaggerate the full extent, or conceal or deny the existence, of pain and discomfort to *critical audiences* such that they can either play or miss games in accordance solely with *their* career interests at that point in time. Moreover, the covert method in which players seek second opinions about, and treatment of, their injuries, such that they are not overtly critical of the physiotherapists at their club, is further conformation of the development of a degree of *cynical detachment*. Action of this nature is deemed not to concur with anticipated occupational cultural norms and is considered intolerable by club directors, managers and physiotherapists who would label those players who engage in this type of resistance as 'troublemakers'. Yet by seeking second opinions covertly players do not defy football club culture, for on the surface they behave in accordance with occupational conventions. Yet their

cynicism towards managers – and the way injuries are managed within the club – enable them to recognise and understand the motivations of managers who, for instance, ask players to 'do a job' even though they may be unfit. Thus, the cynical detachment displayed by players enables them legitimately to resist the wishes of managers without compromising their professional attitudes and reputations among either management or teammates. Players engage in (transgressive) behaviour that results from their adoption of a cynical perspective but which reproduces the cultural prescriptions and relations of power in which they are embedded. Thus, when it comes to occupational cultural prescriptions, players have few alternatives other than to be active participants in their own self-discipline whether that leads to consent, (blind) compliance or resistance in the form of cynicism.

Conclusion

These concluding remarks have examined the cynicism expressed by players as a means of identifying a style of resistance that is arguably less evident in many of the academic studies of professional footballers. Like all other forms of resistance, cynicism involves a degree of 'defence of the self', an attempt by players to maintain a sense of personal integrity. It is argued here that the studies of players have had difficulty in examining forms of resistance to managerial controls for the following two reasons. Firstly, traditional conceptions of resistance that emphasise open and organised – collective – dissent do not have a long history when considered relative to labour and industrial disputes in other industries, for instance, the transport and energy industries. Secondly, most people – not necessarily academics – writing about the game on all levels are to some degree blinded by their value commitment to 'sacred' aspects of the game which raise the life of players above the level of the 'profane'. Player cynicism is understood therefore as a method of 'distancing' in relation to their everyday engagements which reproduce exploitative relations on the one hand and enable players to externalise the control of management as they become realistic and, to some extent, dis-identify with ideals about their statuses to which they were formerly committed on the other.

[1] Although most players are not relieved of these pressures.

[2] Cashmore and Parker (2003) talk of football training as predictable, mundane, and heavily prescribed.

[3] Wacquant quotes former boxer Ralph Wiley who talks of boxing as 'assault and battery'. Wacquant agrees suggesting that 'this assault causes irreversible damage and leaves indelible marks on the body. Fighters know this but, like all entrepreneurs worthy of their name, they are willing to take risks and put their capital – i.e., their body – on the line in the pursuit of occupational success. It is one of the founding antinomies, one of the irresolvable paradoxes of boxing that pugilists worship and cultivate their bodies in order to destruct that of their opponent and, in the process, too often, their own' (Wacquant, 1995, p.82).

[4] England international goalkeeper, David James, has commented on the issue of loyalty in professional football. When asked about whether he would leave West Ham United, who had been relegated to the First Division in 2003, James made the following point: 'Loyalty in football is a contradiction. What is loyalty? It doesn't exist between a player and a club. The club uses the player and vice versa. Once the clubs took all the money and it went to a few individuals. Now it goes to the players but it's spread around a bit more. If there is ever any loyalty, it can only exist between a player and the fans. If Mr Eriksson says playing in the Fist Division doesn't mean I am going to be chucked out, that gives me the opportunity to repay the loyalty West Ham's fans have shown to me. If the club decides to sell me for balance sheet reasons, then what does my loyalty mean?' (*The Sunday Times*, June 8, 2003).

[5] Roy Keane said that Japp Stam was treated as 'a piece of meat' by Manchester United (*The Mirror*, 10 September, 2001).

[6] As well as other sociologists such as Dubin (1976).

[7] The sources of this instrumental orientation were in the class, community and family backgrounds of the employees and not in the workplace itself.

[8] The arguments presented here go some way to highlighting a weakness in the work of Magee (1998), for it is clear that players may be concurrently 'exploited' and yet be 'exploiters' of the circumstances in which they are bound up. Players who are in demand, and financially secure, may also be aware of *their* exploitation by agents and club merchandising directors, as was demonstrated by the example of Alan Shearer who was described as 'smiling the smile' (see page 235).

[9] It is worth noting again that, like players, football club managers are also attempting to 'build' their reputations as skilful managers of player squads. Managers, perhaps more than players, are rated in terms of performance results. In short, both player and manager 'build' career reputations interdependently.

[10] On June 2, 2003, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) announced that, on that date, the number of professional footballers released by clubs and therefore technically out-of-work was 586 players. This figure according to PFA deputy Chief Executive, Mick Maguire, constitutes approximately twenty per cent of the football industry's player workforce. The figure is five per cent higher than at the close of season last summer, 2002. Interviewed for the official website of the PFA, Maguire states that the total 'highlights the fragile nature of the industry', a point emphasised in his additional remark that '75 per cent of our membership play in the Football League and a great many of those are playing with no longer security than a one, or at best, two year contracts' (June 2, 2003). Former Crystal Palace and Brighton player, Simon Rodger, found himself out-of-contract for the second time in two successive seasons. Reflecting on the news of his first release from Crystal Palace in the close season in 2002, Rodger said: 'I was in shock. I'd been with the club for 13 years and it was a real kick in the teeth. I'd had a good relationship with the fans and thought I'd had one of my best seasons. There's no sentiment in football and we're commodities' (*The Guardian*, June 3, 2003). Former England international, Chris Powell, who is also out-of-contract in the close season of 2003 said: 'It's a weird situation because everyone wants a career in football but you never really think you could end up like this. Of course, it will never stop people loving the game and wanting to go into it in the first place' (*The Daily Mirror*, June 3, 2003). At the time of their interviews it is likely that both players and their dependents are experiencing large doses of uncertainty in terms of their future career prospects.

[11] Like other myths about the game which take their cues from media interpretations based on a minority of multi-million pound transfer and contract transactions.

[12] As it has been explained in the Chapter Three, working hard to display the characteristics of a good professional is no guarantee of reward in terms of managerial favour.

Conclusion

Professional football is a form of contingent employment. The data collected for this thesis indicate that *uncertainty* is central to, and is a built-in characteristic of, the experiences of players, for whom career advancement and attainment are never secure. In a manner similar to the (former IBM) computer engineers examined by Sennett (1998), who slowly gained an appreciation of the fact that 'aggravated vulnerability' (p.130) is a pervasive feature of (post)modern, flexible careers, the players analysed in this study similarly acquired an understanding of the precariousness of football as a profession. Unlike the workers in Sennett's study, however, footballers do not embark on their careers anticipating life-long, stable employment, for there is neither a professional nor public perception of job security in this industry. Even young players understand that injury may terminate the career prospects of a potential player, although such dangers may appear distant until feelings of vulnerability are experienced subjectively. In many studies undertaken in the sociology of work, the threat of unemployment constitutes, perhaps, the central risk factor (see, for example, Doogan, 2001; Loÿttyniemi, 2001; Sennett, 1998). Job security, however, is only one of a number of uncertainties encountered by players throughout their careers.

In the world of professional football, injury and the threat of injury are routine. For all players, but particularly for those who are older and more established, pain is a more-or-less permanent feature of their careers (Roderick *et al*, 2000). However, it is not only that injuries for players are routine, but that other people expect them to play with pain and injury as an aspect of displaying a 'good professional attitude' to their work. Failure to display the right attitude may lead players to be stigmatised as having 'no heart' or as malingerers. Consequently, it is extraordinarily difficult for players not to play with an injured body. At times players exhibit stoical tolerance of pain, yet their behaviour and orientation towards their bodies are disciplined by the medical arrangements located in the football clubs. Fatigue and accidents during matches and training expose all players to the risk of injury, and because their identities are invested in the professional game, an injury that terminates that career abruptly and irrevocably is

a major hazard to their identity. Thus, retirement and the possibility of involuntary retirement are important aspects of their careers. The problem of the social relations of managing injury, therefore, is particularly serious, given the fact that playing careers, even under ideal conditions, are relatively short. For the majority of players, the conjunction of ageing and injury, in a situation where discomfort and pain are accepted features of football life, finally brings about an end to their careers.

Implicit throughout each chapter has been an awareness of the changefulness of the frame of mind of players as they mature and age during their careers. Although the process of ageing is a universal biological fact, and one that ultimately has dire consequences for all footballers, who is thought of as aged or old is a matter of social definition[1]. A number of empirical studies (Faulkner, 1974; Gearing, 1997; Weinberg and Arond, 1970) confirm the notion that there is a 'social clock' in professional sport. For example, in his book, *Left Foot Forward*, Garry Nelson (1996) makes constant reference to his age and status among his contemporaries. Against a backcloth of the short-term nature of football careers, Nelson provides numerous telling examples of an older player's awareness of age grading and prejudice. In his playing life, therefore, a player's age can be viewed as a fundamental career contingency, a determinant upon which promotion or rejection may depend. The interview data collected for this study suggest that within professional football clubs, in which there exists youth-intensive recruitment and high levels of internal colleague competition, one's age may facilitate or impede access to opportunities and valued positions. That is to say, older players, like Nelson, may be stigmatised by others by virtue of their age, and not necessarily because of their cognitive or physical deterioration.

In a highly competitive labour market such as professional football, it is important for 'older' players to remain visible. This may require them to move clubs or, at least, to ensure they gather information from trusted individuals about potential connections to other teams. However, remaining visible presents a problem for them, as there is an oversupply of aspirants 'chasing the big-time' (Parker, 1996). In professional football, enormous rewards are concentrated in the hands of a minority of players, whereas, by contrast, the majority fare *relatively* poorly. Such contexts entail a high degree of uncertainty. The excess supply of football talent

leads older players in particular to live in a climate of fear: fear that someone younger, cheaper, fitter and who is perceived to be hungrier for success, may replace them. In addition to the high numbers of aspiring British players, there is – particularly since the Bosman Ruling in 1995 – a further fear of the increasing employment of non-British players. All players are now tied to the global flow of labour in the professional game: that is to say, footballers are now caught up in the flux of the global labour market. There is a general, albeit passive, fear of the internationalisation of the professional game.

So, how do players cope with the pervasive insecurities which are a permanent feature of their working lives? This specific sociological question has been central to this thesis. All the chapters herein examine the ways in which players come to deal with the realities of pursuing a career as a professional footballer. This task has been addressed, in part, by analysing crucial moments of change in their lives, yet none of the interviewees confined their thoughts solely (by reference) to single markers of change. The stories told by players about their changing orientations to work situations overwhelmingly depicted change as a slow, rather than sudden, process. Sociologically, then, focusing on crucial turning points enabled a clearer understanding of processes that are, in reality, rather chaotic and blind. For example, players slowly came to understand the normalcy of their exploitation. They gradually came to realise that their hopes and dreams, their pride, and their pain and discomfort are of little meaning or bearing to managers and club directors, who have their own desires to attend to. In a manner similar to Weber's protestant businessmen, who found in the performance of 'good works' the 'technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation' (Wacquant, 1995, p.87), footballers overcome their anxieties of the risk of rejection and unemployment by playing and training with wholehearted dedication. But this is, of course, exactly what their managers desire of them. For younger players, their 'love' of the game, provides the impetus to keep going when, as it were, 'luck' appears to be running counter to them. For the older players interviewed for this study, their cynicism towards the game in general is a form of *self*-protection and a way for them to maintain their personal integrity. In other words, it is a means by which players may detach or distance their 'selves'

from the constraints of occupational prescriptions and controlling, authoritarian football managers, whilst continuing to appear to comply with them.

Roth (1963) argues that people will not accept uncertainty. They will make an effort, he suggests, to structure it. In his view one way to structure uncertainty is to structure the period of time through which uncertain events occur. The evidence collected for this thesis strongly suggest that players attempt to make some sense of the uncertainty of what future events might happen, and the consequences of certain types of behaviour, by drawing, where possible, on the experiences of others. As a result of such comparisons, players develop benchmarks in relation to time and age to gauge whether their careers are going well or badly. Long periods of time out of the team due to an injury, for example, might be made more psychologically manageable by being broken down into smaller stages. However, while the players interviewed for this study were able to discuss their progress lucidly and create coherent narratives about events retrospectively, most, but particularly the older and former, players considered it impossible to create narratives about what will be. One way in which all employees, including footballers, may adopt a more structural approach to addressing the problem of uncertainty is by networking. Players draw on a fund of social capital to assist their occupational mobility, and to take advantage of opportunities perhaps unforeseen by others. Among people within professional football there is a constant 'buzz', a ceaseless current of rumour flowing from one day to the next about who is unsettled and which managers *fancy* which players. Over time, the interviewees developed informal networks of people 'inside the game' to whom they turned when, for example, their position in the first team was under threat, or when they realise that they are no longer in their manager's plans.

But why, then, do players appear willing to persevere in a profession in which they collude in their own commercialisation and in which they are reduced to the level of a commodity? The rationale of players for their occupational choice can be examined to some extent in relation to monetary rewards, although the skewed distribution of incomes in this sport, particularly since the end of the maximum wage in 1961, is well documented (see, for example, Szymanski and Kuypers, 1999). Many players, however, continue to work because their training in professional football has resulted in them possessing few transferable skills. In

this connection, former Republic of Ireland international, Tony Cascarino, states: 'I play football because I have to play football. I play football because I know nothing else' (Kimmage, 2000, p.6). Professional footballers provide, arguably, classic examples of 'trained incapacity' (Merton, 1957). A question such as this, however, cannot be tackled without reference to the *symbolic* structure of professional football. The work of footballers may appear highly attractive to young aspirants in relation to a number of dimensions of job satisfaction, including the opportunities to feel self-actualised at work, to live an idiosyncratic way of life, to feel a strong sense of community, and to publicly establish their character, ability and strength among the broader population of fans. Although he is referring to professional boxers, Wacquant (1995), whose point could apply equally to professional footballers, argues that 'eliciting the roar and appreciation of the crowd is a prized objective and ample gratification in itself' (p.514). Such 'psychic incomes' (Menger, 1999) must be regarded as an essential dimension of their work. Yet, whether they win or lose, or whether they feel they have achieved all they set out to, players leave bits and pieces of themselves on every pitch. Every match, every tackle, every strained ligament and twisted joint, chips away at the prospect of a healthy future. The attachment of players to the professional game, then, may be understood as a distorted *labour of love*, ever tainted by their rising suspicion that they may be paying too steep a price for the opportunity for social recognition.

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[1] No one laughs when a person in their forties is described as a 'young politician', but a Premier League footballer in their forties, excluding goalkeepers, is, perhaps, unthinkable. It is important, however, to recognise that social definitions of old age vary historically and between different groups within society.

Appendices

Appendix I

Interview Schedule

How many times in your career so far have you been transferred to different clubs? To which clubs were you transferred? Probe.

Can you tell me something of the first time you were transferred? Talk through the move especially personnel involved. Probe.
Under what circumstances were you transferred? Were you released? Bought by a big club/small club etc?

Can you tell me how the move came about? Probe.

How were you contacted, and by whom?

Did you negotiate your move/contract? Did you feel under pressure to sign with the new club? Were there any prominent issues that arose during your discussions? Money/wages/fee etc

With whom did you consider the pros and cons of this move?

Were you given any advice about what to ask for in terms of contract conditions? Did an agent negotiate on your behalf?

Did you leave the club on good terms? probe

Was the manager happy for you to leave?

On reflection, were you pleased to be transferred at this stage in your career?

Can you describe how you felt leaving the club? Probe

What did the transfer mean to you? On balance were you moving for career purposes?

Did you ever think, 'what if I don't make it here?' What if things don't work out?

What, if anything, was unexpected about the move? Did anything at the new club surprise you?

Did you feel pressure to perform? What of the expectations of the new manager/fans?

Have you ever desired to move from a club or requested a transfer? Probe.

Under what circumstances might a player try to instigate a move for himself? Can you offer any examples?

What are the consequences for players of asking to be transferred/for a move? What are the reactions of other players? Is it discussed among the lads?

Do players confide in each other about these types of issues?

Have any clubs put transfer requests in for you which were turned down? How did they come to be rejected?

Looking back on the moves you've made, do you feel they were all in the best interests of your career? Probe.
Do players think about the effects of their moves? Probe.
Are players able to plan or think ahead?

As an established player, are there any differences for you when transferring by comparison to when you were younger? Probe for differences.
What types of conditions would you ask for now, that you didn't ask for when you were first transferred? Probe.

Did you have to make an effort to fit into the new club? Probe.
At what point following your move did you really feel part of the team? Can you describe the situations?

People tend to think that the life of a footballer is a glamorous one. Is this accurate? Probe.

Are there aspects of a player's life that people misunderstand? Are not aware of?

What types of expectations did you have of being a professional footballer? Did you think you would be famous? Probe?

In what ways has your expectations changed?

Can you give me any examples of situations that have led you to change your view of football? Probe. Pressure to perform/playing or not playing/reactions to bad performances/ getting a contract offer ...

How important is it to show a good attitude? How do go about showing a good attitude to the game? Probe.

Can you tell me something about the first time you were told that you would get a professional contract?
Did you always believe you would get one?
Is there much discussion among the lads about who will or will not get a contract offer?
Did anyone ever discuss what would happen if they weren't offered a professional contract?
Can you recall the types of concerns you had as a young player? Probe.

How did things change for you when you signed as a professional? Probe.
What concerns do young professional harbour? Probe. Stagnation in the reserves/signs of progress/contract stability.
When did these concerns reduce for you? Probe.

A number of players I have spoken to expressed concern about getting injured. This is a common concern for players. But are there any other similar kinds of concerns? Probe. Can you give me any examples?
Competition for places/being dropped/loss of form/being sent off...

How do you cope when your team loses?
Do you worry about your performances and what people say about you? Probe.

What about the performances of the team? Do you worry about the performances of your team mates? Probe.

How do you feel about a change of manager? What concerns are generated for you when a manager leaves and a new manager starts? Probe.

What sorts of situations lead to confrontations with managers? Probe.
How do these situations resolve themselves?

Do you enjoy your football? Why? Probe.
Can you remember any occasions when you wished you weren't a player?

We here a lot about the pressure players are under. Are they? Probe.

Have you given any thought to what you might do when your playing career finishes? Probe.

Do you ever discuss future plans with other players? Who? To whom do you discuss these matters?
Do you keep in touch with former playing colleagues? Probe.
Do retired players you know talk of missing the game? Probe.

Questions on players' experiences of injury

Can you remember the physios in your past clubs? Were they any good? Probe.

What about the club doctors? When did you meet them? Probe.

Can you tell me something about any major injuries you have had? Probe in detail about significant injuries?

Have you had any injuries that have kept you out for a number of weeks or longer? What happened? Probe.
What people knew about the injury? Who did you tell first? If any decisions needed to be made about the injury who made the decision? Who else was involved? Was surgery required?
Get the player to talk through the injury process and find out all the people who he talked to about the injury, and what their inputs amounted to. Get him to talk about what it was like being injured? Did the injury ever break down?
Do you get to see or speak to the other players much when you are injured? How do fit players react to players who are injured long-term? Do you notice changes in players who are injured long-term? Probe.
Did you recover from the injury as expected? Probe.

What is it like to miss matches because of injury and have to watch your team play? Probe. Do they always want their team to win?

Can you talk me through a typical day for an injured player? Probe in detail. Who does the player see?

Do you ever talk to people outside the football club about your injuries? Probe.

Have you ever concealed an injury from the team manager and physio? Can he offer any examples? Did anyone other than you know about the injury? Probe. Why didn't he tell anyone? What circumstances would lead you to conceal an injury?

Alternative - Have you ever carried an injury? Probe.

Have you ever had a pain killing injection in order to play? Probe. Did you ask the doctor to tell you what the injection was? Are you happy to play with pain killing injections? What about pain killers such as voltarol and ibuprofen? Probe.

Have you ever expressed any reservations about taking a pain killing injection?

Who decides when you are fit to play in games? Probe. Does the manager ever get involved in these types of decisions?
Are there ever time times when you don't want to get back to fitness and playing matches as soon as possible?

Who do you speak to about injury concerns?

Can you speak to the physio in confidence? Probe. What about the club doctor? Do you think you could tell either about a drug or alcohol problem?

How many games in a season do you think you play completely free from injury? Probe.

Do you know what creatine is? Have you ever taken it? How did you get to know about it? Probe.

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