

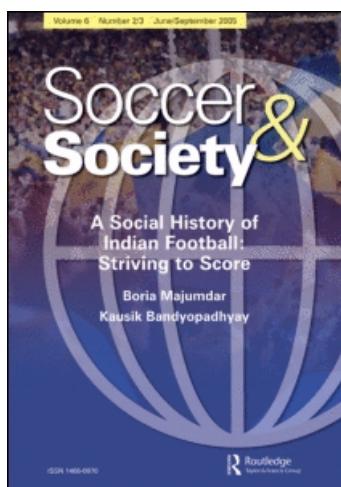
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# Angels of Us All? Football Management, Globalization and the Politics of Celebrity

Stephen Wagg

*This essay takes a critical look at the football manager as global celebrity. Using two eminent contemporary managers – José Mourinho and Sven-Goran Eriksson – as case studies, it argues that football managers in the dominant discourses of the game remain the sole means of explaining the outcome of politically and/or commercially important football matches. The structural factors that affect these outcomes are largely denied. This builds on and reiterates arguments previously presented by the author. He further argues that the socially constructed nature of football management is enhanced by the manager's simultaneous status as celebrity. While appearing to define his own career and expertise, the manager-celebrity is nevertheless crucially defined not only by the performances of his team but also by the impression management elites whose purpose is to promote or to undermine individual celebrities, according to circumstance.*

‘That’s up to you gentlemen...’

England football coach Sven-Goran Eriksson to assembled press people when asked, following England’s defeat by Northern Ireland in a World Cup qualifying match in Belfast on 7 September 2005, whether he expected to keep his job.[1]

Groupies hate musicians. Moviegoers hate movie stars. Autograph men hate celebrities. We love our gods. But we do not love our subjection.

Zadie Smith[2]

## Introduction

On 25 July 2005, with London’s Metropolitan police on high alert following several bombings earlier in the month, armed officers chased a man into Stockwell underground

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railway station in the south west of the city and shot him dead. When it became known that the deceased man was a harmless Brazilian electrician, a makeshift memorial to the man – Jean Charles de Menezes – was soon assembled outside the station. Among the customary flowers, scribbled cards, candles and cuddly toys stood a large placard, upon which, inscribed in felt tip pen, was the message: ‘The *Truth* is Like Olive Oil – It Will Always Come Up to the Surface in the End’. Below, the author of this aphorism is identified as José Mourinho, Portuguese-born manager of Premiership football champions Chelsea. This image can be read in different ways. A lot of Chelsea supporters live in the Stockwell area, which is a short tube-train ride from Chelsea’s ground on the Fulham Road. Equally, Stockwell is a Portuguese enclave. The Stockwell Road was blocked by cheering expatriates when Portugal beat England in Lisbon in Euro 2004 and the first language of many locals, like that of Jean Charles de Menezes himself, is Portuguese. But my principal purpose in citing this message is to show how people, perhaps now more than ever, make heroes of football managers and use them as repositories of wisdom and virtue. The fact that a number of managers – notably those who coach in the much-televised Premiership or are stewards of equally widely viewed national sides – have become global celebrities is the starting point of this essay.

In *Giving the Game Away*, my book of 1995,[3] I tried to argue that, contrary to national myth, England had seldom in its history been the world’s premier football country. Nor, in recent times, has England necessarily had the best league: the Italian league *Serie A* and *La Liga*, the Spanish, have, on the face of it, had stronger claims to make in this regard. But, in the Premiership, the English, via the satellite broadcaster *BSkyB* and numerous other media outlets, have arguably the most famous – the most *known* – league in the world. This has meant that the team managers – or ‘coaches’ to adopt the term more favoured in contemporary discourse – having become national celebrities in the 1960s, are now celebrities on a global scale. The England team, similarly, while well short of world football dominance, has remained the object of popular fascination. Admittedly, much of this fascination has been inspired by their celebrity captain David Beckham but, equally, a great deal of it has lately surrounded the team’s coach, the Swede Sven-Goran Eriksson.

In less than a second, the Google internet search engine reveals 876,000 references to Eriksson, who has coached England since 2001, and a mammoth 1,330,000 to the flamboyant Mourinho (26th June 2007).

This essay will explore the politics of contemporary global football celebrity with specific reference to Eriksson and Mourinho, suggesting what meanings they carry and what they tell us therefore about contemporary football culture and the cultural politics of capitalist globalization. More specifically, it will provide the latest formulation of an argument that I first broached in 1984[4] and revisited most recently in 2005.[5] This argument, in essence, is that football management/coaching is, first and foremost, a paradigm for explaining the results of football matches that are commercially and/or politically important. Football culture generated the myth of football management because it suited the interests of all interested parties: administrators, club proprietors, the football media, players, ex-players and aspiring technocrats. The importance of this paradigm is that, at any given moment in the life of a significant football team,

explanation of that team's performance will be reduced to a single determinant: the stewardship of its manager. All other structural factors and nuances, while not ignored, will be discounted. The football manager-as-paradigm dates back at least to the 1930s and it is now so entrenched that it is difficult for anyone who takes any notice at all of football culture to think outside of it. Where football is concerned the Manager Myth has colonized our commonsense. This, in my view, makes it all the more important to challenge. I hasten to add that I do *not* claim that managers have no expertise or inspirational qualities or that they can never affect the results of football matches. I do, however, argue that these qualities are not, ultimately, what defines managers: football discourse is, in general, guided by results alone and when the myriad judgements come to be made as to why football teams won or lost, the manager becomes the sole locus of explanation – a social actor entirely without context. It is part of the power of sport and popular culture that it persuades us often to suspend our critical faculties – I have often been told, for example, by friends on the British left that 'we can have all those arguments about corporate capitalism – except when it comes to football. When it's football we're the same as anyone else – We Hate Arsenal, or whatever'. But, when the final whistle has blown, the fact remains that, to paraphrase Marx, while football managers may make their own history, they do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing.

The essay takes the form of two case studies of the contemporary football manager and his casting as global celebrity by the world's media. I look first at José Mourinho. Mourinho is, at the time of writing, probably the world's most celebrated football coach and his partly self-cultivated aura of glamorous, slack-tied, can-do managerialism has been eagerly acquired by corporate advertisers – notably American Express and, most recently Samsung. José is a talented man, but to an extent I am writing here, albeit with some trepidation, against the myth that he currently embodies. So discussion of Mourinho will inevitably entail an analysis of the acquisition of Chelsea by the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich and its manifest consequences for the way we understand not only football managers, but notions of fair competition, in sport and beyond. Part of the argument will be that, faced with apparently overwhelming evidence that his team's performance is determined by *structural* factors, Mourinho (and others, especially in the media) have reconstructed and reasserted the myth of managerial accountability in football: Abramovich may have opened his wallet, but, ultimately, it is the coach's *action* that counts.

The second case study concerns Sven-Goran Eriksson, a coach with a high reputation in Portugal, Italy and England, as well as in his native Sweden. While the case of Mourinho, a man hitherto permanently in the ascendancy, shows how the managerial myth is constructed, through a chorus of mutually reinforcing media affirmations, the experience of Eriksson in the summer of 2004 helps to illustrate how social forces work to dismantle individual managerial reputations.

The material used to support my argument is culled largely from the British press (chiefly the liberal *Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* – widely perceived as right wing and suburbanite) or from the internet. In the age of globalization, of course, this is much less ethnocentric than it might appear: British print media feed the internet, which in

turn feeds the world – and *vice versa*. Certainly the language of celebrity, cultural nuances notwithstanding, does not respect national boundaries.

### Sport, Celebrity and Global Culture

Sport, celebrity and global culture and their intersection are all matters that have generated a considerable academic literature in the last 20 years and I hope not to rehearse too many already familiar arguments here.

Modern sport is now in some sense culturally universal – it's played and consumed, in one form or another, across the world. In this context football undoubtedly leads the way, both in the playing and in the consumption of the game.[6] Football is surely rivalled only by the Olympics in the extent of its globalization.[7] The social and political world of football has its leading figures – principally players and coaches/managers – and on many of these figures the mass media – chiefly in the form of satellite television and the internet – have conferred a high degree of celebrity. Celebrity, as a cultural phenomenon, has itself had a growing literature since the 1960s. Writers at least a generation ago began to recognize that a number of people were now known principally *for being known*. One recalls in this context Daniel Boorstin's recognition in the early 1960s of 'our novel power to make men famous' and of the corresponding tendency to convert heroism into celebrity.[8] There was also Edmund Carpenter's eloquent observation that:

Electricity has made angels of us all. Not angels in the Sunday school sense of being good or having wings, but spirit, freed from flesh, capable of instant transportation anywhere. The moment we pick up a phone, we're nowhere in space – everywhere in spirit. [President Richard] Nixon on TV is everywhere at once. That is the Neo-Platonic definition of God: a Being whose centre is everywhere, whose borders are nowhere.[9]

Sport has its share of these 'angels' of course and, as long ago as 1956 the radical American sociologist C. Wright Mills was expressing dismay that the star system was already 'carried to the point where a man who can knock a small white ball into a series of holes with more skill and efficiency than anyone else thereby gains social access to the President of the United States'.[10]

Rojek distinguishes between celebrity and other forms of social eminence – for example, *renown*. The latter is distinction attributed within a given social network (like professional football); celebrity is, in its Latin root, simply to do with fame and 'being thronged'. [11] According to Rojek, celebrities, in their modern form, are the result of three interrelated processes: the growth of democracy (and the corresponding decline in traditional, usually monarchical, authority); the decline of organized religion; and the commodification of everyday life.[12] He also accepts, along with most writers, that celebrities do not ascend, spontaneously from among the common people; on the contrary, they are, to a degree, a 'cultural fabrication', fashioned by an array of PR, fashion and other impression management professionals.[13] These professionals are the engine room of what Rojek calls the 'a pervasive system of mass communication [through which] culture has become mediagenic'. [14] This system is, it now goes

virtually without saying, global in its reach and within it football stars have a special prominence. As leading practitioners, or stewards, of the world's favourite and most televised sport they become globally recognized and, once recognized, they become *de facto* celebrities – considered and reported perhaps independently of the sport itself. In newspaper terms their newsworthiness spreads from the sports pages to the front pages, and any other page besides. David Beckham is clearly the prime example here.[15]

The principal study of sport stardom is by David Andrews, Steven Jackson and their collaborators.[16] They endorse Marshall's view that celebrities embody the twin discourses of neo-liberal democracy and consumer capitalism[17] and that, within this context, celebrities are both *product* and *process*. That is to say, we consume an increasing amount of information about celebrities and this process becomes, at the same time, the process through which the social worlds inhabited by these celebrities is understood. Here, it is widely accepted, sport celebrities, like other celebrities, are *ideological* figures[18] and it is the purpose of this essay to explore the ideological nature of contemporary discourses on the celebrity football manager. The assumption will be that these discourses are important both for what they say about global sport celebrity generally and what they say specifically about football management – which now rivals political office as one of the most visible forms of stewardship in the world.

These arguments are offered with what, in the international sociology of sport, are now the customary caveats. The search for sufficiently nuanced theories of power notwithstanding, it would, in the recent words of Sugden and Tomlinson, be 'folly to abandon the notion of a hegemony that illuminates the nature of the contest and struggle over resources [and] the conditions whereby consent is secured by the dominant'.[19] There will always be resistance to hegemonic accounts of the world and the awareness of this resistance has frequently been reiterated, both in relation to sport and globalization[20] and to the matter of sport celebrity: as Andrews and Jackson observe, celebrity cannot, beyond a certain point, be scripted.[21] Nevertheless, celebrities are now, arguably, a key way in which a significant swathe of the world's population understands social and political affairs: indeed, a British academic referred recently to 'the increasing *displacement* of democracy by celebrity'.[22]

### **José Mourinho: All My Own Work**

The British liberal newspaper the *Guardian* recently carried an interview with a number of hedge fund managers in the City of London. Hedge fund managers are, in effect, financiers who make more hazardous, but potentially more lucrative, market predictions than other City professionals. As such they are usually extremely prosperous people. One commented: 'for some reason people don't resent paying David Beckham a lot of money, but they do resent paying hedge fund managers a lot of money'.[23] Clearly the speaker sees himself as Beckham's equivalent in the financial world, but without the social honour accorded to Beckham, Ronaldo and the rest. As this remark illustrates, football, now by common consent a global preoccupation, is an area of social life in which crucial hegemonies are forged. The social and political

consequences of contemporary capitalism find a far wider acceptance when they are embodied by football people than when represented by capitalists themselves. In this context there is currently no more significant figure than José Mourinho. The media discourses that circumscribe him and his world are heavy with implied ideological statements both about life in capitalist societies since 1945 and, more specifically, about the deregulation of economic life in the last 20 years of the twentieth century. Mourinho, I should stress, is a willing participant in the framing of these discourses. Highly skilled in the presentation of self, as football managers have often learned to be, José is wholly at ease in his frequent press conferences, talking in fluent English about his achievements, as reporters scribble or hold their cassette recorders closer to his mouth. There are essentially three intertwining stories in the chronicle of Mourinho's and Chelsea's success. One is of a glamorous and plain-speaking individual who is accomplished and has become so by being His Own Man. The second is of a wealthy man – Chelsea benefactor Roman Abramovich – who is quiet and unassuming, who wishes to use his fortune simply to endow the people's game and to Follow a Dream. The third discourse concerns the Premiership, now probably the most famous league in the world but increasingly, like many other national leagues, seen as lacking credibility as a competition, its winner too easily foretold. The latter two stories are, in effect, importantly subsumed by the first: Mourinho himself.

As I observed earlier, it is not difficult to find reference to Mourinho on the internet. He is much written about and a lot of the writing is such as to create a mythical figure. This extract from an article by Mark Zeigler, Staff Writer on the *San Diego Union-Tribune* is typical:

Twelve years ago, he was a P.E. teacher in the Portuguese city of Setubal.

Eleven years ago, he was the translator for a British coach with Portugal's Sporting Lisbon.

Four years ago, he had yet to be a head coach.

Three years ago, he was with some club called Uniao Leiria in the Portuguese countryside.

And yesterday, José Mourinho became one of the highest-paid coaches in the history of soccer. His contract with England's Chelsea: a reported \$29.4 million over four years, or roughly \$141,000 per week.

For a guy who never played professional soccer.

But it's hard to argue that Mourinho doesn't deserve it – at age 41, with only four years of head coaching experience. In two full seasons at FC Porto, with just a fraction of the budget of a Real Madrid or Man U or AC Milan, he merely won five titles – two league championships, one Portuguese Cup, the 2003 UEFA Cup and, last week, the UEFA Champions League with a 3-0 victory over AS Monaco.[24]

There are several important signifiers here, all of them central to the myth of Mourinho and to the wider myths of contemporary football coaching. Firstly, Mourinho is from Portugal, a southern European nation historically less prosperous than those of north western Europe and less likely than these nations (particularly

Germany, the Netherlands, England and France) to have produced winning football teams. Nor, unlike these northern European countries (and here we could add Scotland) is Portugal especially associated with prowess in football management. Nor has Portugal been close to the centre of power in FIFA or UEFA. In this sense, Mourinho strode in from the periphery.

Secondly, José did not play football as a professional. In Britain for the greater part of the last century, this would have disqualified a man from managing a League team. Only two or three non-professionals (notably, George Allison, who managed Arsenal between 1934 and 1947) were able to get such jobs and in the 1970s British professional football people tended to scorn those who 'hadn't played'.<sup>[25]</sup> Today it's different. The modern football world, concerned to explore every avenue in the pursuit of victory, now embraces science, strategy and technique, no matter who might propagate them. The mystical link between football and working-class culture is slowly, but surely, being loosened. To reserve top jobs in football coaching for those who had played the game professionally would now be seen as a restrictive practice. Mourinho, like Arsene Wenger, Eriksson, Gerard Houllier and others, seems, in football terms, to have come from nowhere. These men are essentially professorial and corporate figures powered principally, it seems, by ambition and intellect. By contrast, Sir Alex Ferguson, who worked in the Glasgow shipyards, who played for top Scottish club Glasgow Rangers and whose Manchester United has won the Premiership eight times, nevertheless seems now to belong to a vanishing culture. On 26 September 2005, with Manchester United already trailing Chelsea by ten points in the Premiership, Ferguson appears at a press conference to promote the coming Champions League match with Benfica. Here he angrily refuses to answer reporters' questions about United's apparent decline. In his mind, one senses, professional football is still the exclusive concern of the tough and private men who played it. Behind him is a board bearing the logos of Heineken, PlayStation 2, Ford and MasterCard suggesting that it is not.<sup>[26]</sup> Mourinho therefore represents a new order in football coaching based on science, technocracy, merit and the free access of the commercial media. He, like other modern coaches, is primarily a cerebral figure, hired and highly remunerated for his mind, not for any cultural credential that he might carry. He is apparently wholly at ease in this new world. Indeed American Express feature him in a current TV advertisement. Mourinho, a gifted self-publicist, helped to script the commercial himself and it portrays him as 'a man continually one step ahead of events, serving his daughter toast at home and putting up an umbrella before a downpour'.<sup>[27]</sup> He is also seen instructing his players in some manoeuvre and then striding on, perhaps to spend some of his top-man salary, he and the prestigious piece of plastic in his pocket fully deserving of each other.

In the case of Mourinho, however, this story of a confident, self-possessed technocrat has been told in crucially unpropitious circumstances. José's myth is propounded specifically *against* the political and economic context in which he has been employed by Chelsea to work. Chelsea's rise to prominence has been funded by the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich. Abramovich has recently been estimated to be the 11th richest man in the world and came by his wealth through the deregulation of the economy of the USSR in the 1990s. Russia after the Soviet Union was purported,

under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin (1991–99), to be a stake-holding society in which the mass of the citizenry owned shares, principally in the industries that employed them. Vouchers worth 10,000 roubles each were issued to facilitate this. However, Abramovich and other entrepreneurs soon purchased these shares cheaply and in large numbers, often using front companies to do so. This acquisition of shares, and of further shares issued in apparently preferential circumstances by the Russian government, hugely enriched Abramovich and a handful of his fellow business people: it has been estimated that by 2004 60 per cent of the Russian economy was owned and controlled by 23 oligarchs. Russia's gross domestic product, on the other hand, had fallen below that of Costa Rica.[28]

The discourses that frame Mourinho are important here in two related ways. Firstly, although Abramovich's benefaction (worth an estimated £440 million up to January 2006.) is acknowledged in sports commentary, as is the superior wealth of the big clubs in general, the principal football discourse is of *managers* and this has been so since the 1960s.[29] Thus, in the prevailing discourse, Chelsea have won the Premiership because of Mourinho's skill and not because of Abramovich's fortune. To assert otherwise would be to undermine a fundamental element in the prevailing ideology of post-war capitalist societies, clearly embodied in Premiership and thousands of sports leagues besides: that in such societies there is *equality of opportunity* and that *money cannot buy success*. This accords with the popular affirmation of leading Western politicians, such as Tony Blair, that there must be chances 'for the many, not the few'. Mourinho has skilfully endorsed this already entrenched definition of the situation. 'If I wanted to have an easy job', he has said, 'I would have stayed at Porto'. On another occasion, he asserted 'We are on top at the moment but not because of the club's financial power. We are in contention for a lot of trophies because of my hard work', and, similarly, he has elsewhere insisted that: 'If Roman Abramovich helped me out in training we would be bottom of the league and if I had to work in his world of big business, we would be bankrupt!' These remarks are, needless to say, now among a large number collected on a website dedicated to the expressed wisdom of José Mourinho.[30]

Moreover, Mourinho has carried his confident self-assertion into discussion of the Premiership and of the prospects of Chelsea's rivals – if rivals they be. On 16 September 2005, with the season not a month old, Mourinho told the press that nearest challengers Arsenal, who had already lost two matches, could only afford to lose one more. 'Forget the Title Race Arsene' was the subsequent headline on the back of London's *Daily Mirror*, 'Mourinho writes off Gunners after just FOUR games. "The tendency is for the big teams not to lose too many matches" observes Mourinho.'[31] Once again, this kind of commentary takes the Premier League out of its social and economic context. Attendance figures for the league are falling and the attention of academics and accountants is beginning to focus on the declining competitiveness of top class football.[32] But the near-certainty, three weeks into a season, that a particular club will win the title is more widely rendered, not as the result of distorted economic arrangements, but simply as an artefact of the skill and brashness of that club's manager.

Secondly, the conventional discourse of football reportage, by placing Mourinho-as-Manager as the central determinant of the Chelsea success story, depoliticizes

Abramovich and, by extension, the neo-liberal social and political arrangements that have begun to proliferate around the world. In the world of *production*, Abramovich has been part of a massive redistribution of much of a nation's wealth to a few individuals – a process whereby modern Russia became a kleptocracy (government by thieves). In the story of Chelsea, however, it is José Mourinho who is the *producer* and Abramovich is styled primarily as a *consumer*: TV cameras frequently catch him in the stand, smiling shyly or punching the air when a Chelsea goal is scored. Here, as with his other signifiers – the jeans, the open necked shirt – he is just like us: a supporter, who loves his football and wants to help the team and enjoy their success. Despite fading support for the notion that 'politics should be kept out of sport', mainstream football journalism does not concern itself unduly with the politics upon which sport is contingent. This is seen as the proper concern of the comparatively minor media realm of 'investigative journalism'. Thus, profiles of Abramovich have tended to concentrate on irony – for example, after Roman's endowment the club were now frequently referred to as 'Chelski' and the cover of the football fanzine *When Saturday Comes* recently featured a picture of Abramovich arm in arm with Chelsea defender John Terry: beneath the headline 'Chelsea Break the Rules' a bubble appears next to Abramovich's mouth asking 'What are "rules" John?'.<sup>[33]</sup> And there has been plenty of 'human interest' coverage of Abramovich the private individual – he was an orphan, of a Jewish family, grew up near the shivering cold of the Arctic Circle and so on and 'began his business career selling plastic ducks from a grim Moscow apartment'.<sup>[34]</sup> Thus, via Chelsea and the conventions of the international sports media, Abramovich gained global renown as a football supporter and benefactor and not as the problematic recipient of much of his nation's natural resources. Chelsea were now becoming a global club, but talk of Chelsea was invariably talk of Mourinho, not of its owner – Abramovich. In September 2005 Abramovich sold his stake in the Russian oil company Sibneft, estimated at one time as around 97 per cent, for £7.4 billion. It was rumoured that his personal fortune as a result stood at £10 billion and that he would now leave Russia.<sup>[35]</sup>

Meanwhile the inevitable biographies of Mourinho have begun to appear, notably one by the respected football journalist Patrick Barclay with its equally inevitable title of *Mourinho: Anatomy of a Winner*.<sup>[36]</sup>

How have the stories that are José Mourinho been consumed by his global audience? He is known to be popular in some 'Lusophone spaces' – particularly among expatriate Portuguese people who are disparaged as the Other in their countries of settlement. Beyond this, importantly, he has, via the global media outlets of television and the internet, become the focal point of the ongoing campaign to make Chelsea a world brand – to persuade people to think of Chelsea as 'we'. This has entailed, as so often in football fandom, the promotion of a particularism – a development wholly in keeping with the cultural trends of globalization. Indeed, Maguire, quoting Robertson, talks of 'the particularization of universalism and the universalizing of particularism' in relation to global(ized) sport.<sup>[37]</sup> This particularism will in the main be carried by a global cyber-tribe, adopting the club's apparel, watching them on TV in bars and cafes across the world and communing with other converts on the internet. Like all particularisms,

it can be venomous: in February 2005 Chelsea lost a Champions League game against Barcelona at the Nou Camp Stadium. Mourinho accused the Swedish referee Andre Frink of bias and collusion with the Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard. Frink received death threats and announced his immediate retirement. This drew a reprimand for Mourinho from UEFA but, for many of the growing cadre of Chelsea identifiers in the global football supermarket, Mourinho offers a warm tent filled with pride-by-proxy. He's attractive, he's brash, he's a winner and he's 'theirs'. This, of course, makes him, potentially, a hate figure for other tribes. In 2004 a writer styling himself as 'Blingo Starr', a Chelsea internet 'blogger', posted an article ironically entitled 'José Mourinho: Anti-Christ'. Mourinho's vaunting of his/Chelsea's success had made a lot of football people angry, he wrote:

Normally this kind of ire is reserved for either 'The Champions' (Arsenal seem to be untouchable because of the way they play) or Manchester United (for once showing signs of being mortal). But now into this void steps Chelsea, ably personified in the form of Mourinho. We are rich, we have a cocky manager, and we've no great tradition in football other than for kicking a few people's heads in during the '70s and '80s. I love it. Bring it on you peasants! [38]

It is part of the central thrust of my argument, of course, that, if his football circumstances were to change, Mourinho's reputation, the public perception of his abilities and so on, would be changed with them. When his team falters, the myth of an individual manager's powers is rapidly undermined and he may likewise encounter the volatile politics of celebrity in the process. The case of Sven-Goran Eriksson in 2004 shows some of the possible dimensions of this process.

### **Sven-Goran Eriksson: The Swede, the Secretary and the Vortex**

So the remainder of this essay is concerned with media discourses of Sven-Goran Eriksson, who became coach to the England football team in January of 2001, and, in particular, with a 'feeding frenzy' of press reportage of Eriksson's affair with a female secretary at the Football Association in 2004. Garry Whannel has called such episodes, wherein the world's media home in upon a person or an event, feeding off each other's reportage as they do so and making it 'temporarily difficult for columnists and commentators to discuss anything else', as moments of 'vortextuality'. [39] The media vortex which briefly consumed Eriksson necessarily involved a number of sometimes necessarily conflicting discourses. These conflicts relate loosely to different sections of the media market, but, taken together, they say a good deal about the phenomenon of football coach as global celebrity.

Eriksson made his name as a football coach in his home country of Sweden in the 1970s and early 1980s, before moving to Portugal to manage Benfica. Under his stewardship Benfica won a number of trophies. This made him very popular in the country and he is said to have been mobbed by thousands of Portuguese supporters when he arrived at the Lisbon branch of IKEA to buy a new trophy cabinet. He then coached Lazio in the Italian *Serie A* before accepting the England job in 2000. On his appointment FA spokesman Brian Nutmeg told a packed news conference: 'He's more experienced

than Kevin Keegan, more diplomatic than Glenn Hoddle, cheaper than Terry Venables and speaks better English than Graham Taylor.’[40] Eriksson then bought a large house in London with his Italian partner Nancy Dell’Olio. Both became media celebrities. In early August of 2004 it became known, via a tabloid newspaper, that Faria Alam, a secretary at Football Association headquarters, had had affairs both with Eriksson and with FA Chief Executive Mark Palios. Miss Alam’s reflections on these relationships appeared shortly thereafter in two leading Sunday tabloids: the *Mail on Sunday*, with a suburban, lower middle-class market and *The News of the World*, Britain’s oldest mass circulation and best selling newspaper, now owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. Here Alam paid tribute to Eriksson’s delicate lovemaking and declared herself willing to marry him. She left the FA and, the following year, lost a case for unfair dismissal. Palios and FA Communications Director Colin Gibson, an ex-sports reporter, also both left the FA. Media material generated by these events was taken up by news outlets all round the world.

Although they clearly overlap at a number of points, there seem to be a number of distinctive media discourses or points of inference that can be identified in the Eriksson/Alam episode. These include:

*Sexy Sven: Eriksson becomes a Lover, not a Coach*

The sex lives of famous people are, first of all, a media staple, especially in relation to the tabloid press of various countries, and there is nothing here which is, in principle, specific either to Eriksson or to football. Reportage of this kind by the popular/populist media is represented, spuriously, as a democratic instrument, in two ways. Firstly, because it reduces variously famous, wealthy and powerful people to their bodies, placing them symbolically on the level of ordinary folk and revealing them to have the same desires and susceptibilities as the rest of us. Secondly, and related to this, these stories are frequently held by the people who publish them to be the result of press vigilance on behalf of these ordinary folk and to represent therefore some democratic calling to account. This is the central predicate of the Eriksson/Alam vortex, but it feeds into several other dimensions of the politics of celebrity football management.

The Alam press coverage undermined Eriksson as a technocrat. When he came to England the media revelled in his scholarly aura. His high forehead, his spectacles and his patient, cautious answers to the questions put to him all suggested an essentially professorial person, leading England football, at last, into modernity. TV cameras sometimes were directed to go close up, photographing only his eyes and denoting therefore the cerebral dimension of the man. Now, through the Alam affair, a new definition of Eriksson became available to the media. Sven the Coach became Sven the Lover. Vast areas of his domestic life were opened up: he filled the dishwasher before sex, he wore cotton pyjamas, he had three other lovers beside Alam and Nancy.[41] The man with so much football wisdom behind his eyes became, alternatively, the man with something he just couldn’t keep in his trousers. A year later the progress of this fallen man was still being charted. In late summer 2005 the British *News of the World* suggested a new relationship between Eriksson and a presenter from a TV porn channel. The story

was exported, among other places, to Eriksson's Swedish homeland where it appeared on the front of the Sunday tabloid *AFTONBLADET* with the headline 'Svennis Nya Karleks-Skandal [Sven's New Love Scandal] (28 August).

However, once broached, the sexualization of Eriksson could be taken in different directions, some censorious, some not.

### *FA HQ as Den of Vice*

It is part of the tradition of the British press popular press that essentially salacious stories of illicit sex be couched in terms of moral reproof. It's reasonable to assume that this style of journalism has declined in recent years, as societies have become more hedonistic and the boundaries of licit sexual behaviour have become correspondingly extended and blurred. Thus, in the Eriksson/Alam affair, while the popular press concentrated on sensitivity in bed, it was the more middle-class broadsheet press that found more space for moral condemnation. *Guardian* sport reporter Michael Walker, for example, wrote of the 'FA's sordid Soho affairs', Soho being the district of central London that is the heart of the city's sex trade: 'If, as is rumoured, there is a third senior man at the FA who has become embroiled with Alam at some point, then the association as a whole will look very Soho indeed'.<sup>[42]</sup> A week later, in *The Observer*, Tim Adams similarly employs the vocabulary of decadence to describe 'Football's cesspit of hype and cash'. Here, though, the 'enervating nonsense' of the sexual liaisons at FA headquarters becomes a metaphor for a game addled by big money:

Whereas Rupert Murdoch's Sky money inflated football beyond the affordable budget of most of us, it also lent a pomposity ... that it scarcely deserved. Roman Abramovich's millions have warped the reality of the upper reaches of the sport still further. The Russian has offered football the pornographic pull of extreme wealth.<sup>[43]</sup>

Here, then, sex is not the real contaminant; money is.

### *Eriksson and the Nature of Desire*

Desire is now a central and taken-for-granted element in the politics of celebrity. So, while parallel debates raged about the future of the FA and some of its leading executives, some writers fell to discussing Eriksson as an object of desire and the broader issue of sex for men of his (i.e. middle) age.

Some of this discussion is openly hostile and firmly within the Love Rat paradigm now favoured by the British popular press. This provides a vestigially feminist (and therefore modern) pretext for sex stories, exploring the possibilities of betrayal by the male of the female party. On this theme, in the *Daily Mail*, beneath the headline 'What on Earth do Women see in Sven?' Amanda Platell, former press secretary to the leader of the British Conservative Party, muses:

Nancy may not be the most vulnerable woman on the block, but she gave up her marriage to be with Sven, and has spent six years playing the part of the perfect manager's consort. She was good enough for Sven to take to Downing Street [the

Prime Minister's official residence], she was good enough to placate all those whining footballers' wives in Portugal, but she wasn't good enough to be told the truth – that she was only one woman among many.[44]

Other commentators were more straightforwardly curious about this man's attractiveness. For example, while critical of Eriksson's roving eye, sports journalist Clare Balding wrote:

Having been reduced to a blushing fool incapable of coherent conversation by Eriksson's unerring gaze, I can testify to his charm. He may look like a boring businessman in a grey suit, with all the sex appeal of cold custard, but his intensity and his manner suggest there is more to discover if one only had the chance to know him.[45]

Still other writers choose age, rather than gender, as the organizing focus of their comments. For instance, rejecting all other current definitions of the Eriksson/Alam situation, *Guardian* columnist David Aaronovitch insists: 'It's not about any of those things. It is about the sheer terror of being caught, in Britain, having middle-aged sex.' [46]

#### *Sven as Guest Worker*

It is now common for national sports teams to be coached by people of a different nationality. However, this simple fact of life in globalized sport culture arguably gained late and only partial acceptance in the social world of English football, a social world still in part defined by the belief that association football was England's invention and it's gift to the world – in effect, the 'missionary position'. [47] Eriksson was the first non-British national to coach the England football team and his Swedishness became an identifiable element in the confected media outrage that greeted his affair with Alam. Part of Platell's castigation, for example, crucially includes the assertion that his conduct 'may pass as gentlemanly behaviour where you come from, Sven, but over here it just makes you a gutless creep'. [48] The following day, in the same paper, Eriksson's foreign status is again stressed: Jeff Powell's headline is 'FA bosses must not let slippery Swede escape'. [49] A year later, when England were beaten in a World Cup qualifying game by Northern Ireland, a disgruntled crowd approached the England team bus shouting 'Sack the Swede, sack the Swede'. [50]

#### *A Failure of Impression Management: The 'PR Own Goal'*

In contemporary media discourse the language of news is often simultaneously the language of news *management*. This shows that journalists and publicity advisors often see themselves as belonging to the same (impression management) business and this is illustrated by the frequent dealings, and flow of personnel, between the PR and news-gathering sectors. Ex-journalists are often employed as PR advisors, the most famous recent example being Alistair Campbell, official spokesman and subsequent 'communications chief' to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair between 1994 and 2003 and former journalist on the British tabloid the *Daily Mirror*. This is a social landscape which

features many poachers now turned gamekeepers – or, perhaps more appropriately, *gatekeepers*.

Thus, expectably, the ‘PR’ discourse on the Eriksson/Alam affair avoided moral judgements and concentrated on the pragmatics of the controversy. Importantly, therefore, it acknowledged the *constructed* nature of celebrity and public reputation. In the *Guardian*, ex-editor of the *Daily Mirror* Roy Greenslade discusses the actions of Colin Gibson, the FA’s director of communications, who had resigned over the affair. Greenslade’s discussion is dispassionate but it seems to him clear that, while acknowledging ‘the wholly intrusive nature of the tabloid agenda’ and that, in pursuit of this agenda, ‘deals between PRs and journalists are common’, this particular one was ‘shabby’ and Gibson’s subsequent resignation ‘no surprise’.[51] Earlier, in the *Daily Mail*, where Gibson had previously been sports editor, a two page article, itself a continuation of the paper’s front page story, carries the headline ‘A stunning own goal by the FA’. This article includes a lengthy transcription of Gibson’s negotiation with representatives of *The News of the World*.[52] In these negotiations, his objective is to protect the privacy of Palios, who is attempting a reconciliation with the mother of his five daughters and hoping to avoid publicity such as this. At one point Gibson asks: ‘Is there any deal we can do around more information about her [Alam] and Sven and none about Palios at all?’ In this discourse Gibson is criticized less for proffering this deal than for failing to secure it. As Greenslade points out, Gibson ‘did not appear to have sealed a conclusive gagging deal before leaking controversial material about Eriksson’.[53]

### *Work, Not Sex: The Myth of Football Management*

In many minds the question raised by Gibson’s conduct was why the FA’s ‘director of communications’ had been so ready to provide information on the sex life of the England coach, so prepared, in other words, to see Eriksson the cool technocrat reduced, symbolically, to his body – a body, it was now implied, which was in a semi-permanent state of arousal. A number of commentators chose to ‘go behind’ the visible facts of the affair and, quoting anonymous ‘insider’ testimony, to suggest that the FA was dissatisfied with Eriksson’s work as England coach and that the stories of his sex life were simply a pretext on which to be rid of him. In *The Observer*, Denis Campbell and David Smith reported that ‘some of English football’s senior figures portray Eriksson as a lazy, greedy, disloyal, uncommitted manager whose managerial weaknesses have let the game’s big prizes slip from England’s grasp.’ To his critics, England’s lacklustre performances in Portugal [in Euro 2004] and the excuses Eriksson offered after their defeat on penalties to the hosts in the quarter final also show that he is not equipped to fulfil the FA’s ambition of winning a major championship by 2006 with what is by common consent the country’s most talented crop of players to emerge in a generation.[54] ‘Sven Stays’, ran another headline, ‘But FA powerbrokers are still out to get him’.[55]

Once again, these private testimonies go right to the heart of the historic myth of football management itself. They point to its nature as a social construction and show

how this construction is essentially hegemonic and paradoxical. Since the 1960s global football culture has increasingly acknowledged that the fortunes of football teams were caused by the men who either ‘managed’ or ‘coached’ them, according to the preferred terminology. This conviction is often maintained in the face of apparently powerful evidence to the contrary – as with the insistence that Chelsea’s rise has been wrought by José Mourinho, with little sense that the huge sums of money with which the club has been endowed have been a prerequisite for this. The residual belief in their expertise has led to the payment of huge salaries to football managers: Eriksson, for example, is paid £4 million per year by the FA and such incomes are not uncommon, or even especially high, in international football. However, in societies across the world, a few poor performances by a football team are often enough to persuade many lay people that its manager/coach is an incompetent and that he must be dismissed. In England ‘You don’t know what you’re doing’ is now a chant frequently addressed to coaches, rather than to referees. This is an implicit and continuing challenge to the hegemony of the myth of football management. Football managers are experts one minute. The next minute, they’re fools: *we*, the ordinary people, could do better. This vulnerability to the vagaries of lay opinion places football managers closer to the politics of celebrity than to the politics of the professions: the lives of professionals are governed, ideally, by peer review.

#### *Modernize or Die: The FA Committee as Anachronism*

However, another, quite different political subtext was traceable in reportage of this affair and in this reading both Eriksson and Palios were incidental figures. A number of writers wanted to talk of a crisis at the FA itself – one stemming from a managerial ineptitude, of which the mishandling of the Eriksson/Alam affair was implied to be only a symptom.

During early August 2004 newspapers reported with some relish the resignations of Palios and Gibson and speculated, often with equal enthusiasm, about further possible departures. The FA, with press camped permanently on its doorstep, was in apparent chaos. In the *Guardian*, Paul Kelso reported that:

nine hours of talks between senior executives, board members and lawyers broke up [last night] with the FA unable to offer a definitive statement on its position after a weekend that saw the resignation of the chief executive Mark Palios and doubt cast over the future of the chairman, Geoff Thompson.[56]

*The Independent* described the FA as being ‘in total disarray’[57] and the following week the *Guardian* ran the headline ‘Thompson on the edge’.[58] Three days on, in the *Sunday Mirror*, Richard Stott referred to the FA leadership as ‘these lethally incompetent, dubbin [boot polish]-brained nonentities’.[59]

For some observers, though, this extravagant painting of an organization in apparent meltdown was a depiction more or less contrived to strengthen the case for ‘modernising’ the FA – specifically to streamline its management to meet the ‘needs’ of the globalized football business. In this context, the FA’s apparent bungling was said to relate to

its archaic (although some might have said more democratic) structures. In the *Daily Mail* Steve Curry points out:

There are 92 FA councillors, elected representatives from the constituent parts of the game, including the Premier League, the Football League, 43 county associations, the universities, schools and the armed forces...

For years FA Council members wielded the power in football under a general secretary and they would arrive at meetings that resembled geriatric conventions with rarely a gathering being held without a silence for some deceased member...

It was not until December 1999 ... that it was decided that the major business, strategic and commercial decisions should be taken by a steamlined board of directors.

Even with this more effective non-executive board, however, there have been concerns frequently expressed by Government, and calls for an overhaul of the entire FA structure...

The days when committee members treated the players like schoolboys, addressing them by their surnames, may have gone but sadly the committees still remain. The time has come for change.[60]

The committee that Curry describes has six members from the 'professional game' and six from the 'national game' what used to be called the 'amateur game' until the distinction was abolished in 1974. Four of the six professional members are from the Premier League. The hue and cry over Eriksson and Alam was seen by some as part of a propaganda campaign to shift executive power at the FA further toward the Premier League and the huge commercial interests that attach to it. This has already happened, Curry indicates, in countries such as Germany. Here, he suggests, 'the people who generate the wealth have all the power' – this conception of wealth creation being, of course, an historic, plain and unalloyed piece of capitalist ideology.[61]

## Conclusion

José Mourinho and Sven-Goran Eriksson are important embodiments and *recipients* of two vital myths in global sport and popular culture: the myths of the *celebrity* and of the *football manager*. For each man both celebrity and football management are things that they *do* and which are *done to them*. In either capacity they are endowed, via the media, with special significance and unusual powers; and, in either capacity, these powers may, at any time, symbolically be stripped away. The myths that they embody work to deny the material realities of life in increasingly unequal societies, suggesting that success does not accrue to rich men, but to talented ones, who become rich only through their ingenuity and hard work. The myths of celebrity and football management endure, although the individual embodiments of these myths are often cast aside. They are redefined as fools and failures. They clear their desks or depart the TV screens – Carpenter's angels converted back into flesh. Many commentators in the Eriksson/Alam media vortex remarked that a person's sex life should be his or her own business and not for public examination or judgement. This, of course, is right but 'tabloid agendas' ultimately cannot be enacted without some degree of public acquiescence. As

Zadie Smith suggests, in the preface to this essay, there is an element of hatred in the regard people have for celebrities, which derives from the social and emotional subordination which celebrity culture entails. The emotionally volatile nature of celebrity culture can only be heightened by the myth of football management. A football manager's skills cannot be known, *even* to himself; they can only be believed. Belief in a football manager can dissipate far more quickly than belief in a surgeon whose patient dies or a lawyer who loses a case. Both celebrity and football management are socially constructed; both are, in a real sense, a displacement for democracy; and both can be rapidly undermined by the removal, metaphorical or symbolic, of the subject's clothing.

### Acknowledgement

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### Notes

- [1] Sven-Goran Eriksson's remark was widely quoted and could be found, among other places, in Matt Dickinson's article 'Eriksson feels the heat after sad England's latest debacle' at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,27-1770544,00.html>
- [2] This observation by Zadie Smith appeared in the Review section of the British newspaper *The Guardian* on 3 September 2005, 19.
- [3] Wagg, *Giving the Game Away*.
- [4] Wagg, *The Football World*.
- [5] Wagg, 'No Scouse, Please, We're Europeans'.
- [6] Giulianotti, *Sport: A Critical Sociology*, xi.
- [7] Hargreaves, 'Globalisation Theory, Global Sport and Nations and Nationalism', 33.
- [8] Boorstin, *The Image*, 55.
- [9] Carpenter, *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!*, 11.
- [10] Mills, *The Power Elite*, 74.
- [11] Rojek, *Celebrity*, 9–10.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 13.
- [13] *Ibid.*, 10.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 16.
- [15] Whannel, 'Punishment, Redemption and Celebration in the Popular Press'; Cashmore, *Beckham*.
- [16] Andrews and Jackson, *Sports Stars*.
- [17] Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*.
- [18] Rojek, *Celebrity*, 35; Andrews and Jackson, 'Introduction', 7–8.
- [19] Sugden and Tomlinson, 'Theory and Method for a Critical Sociology of Sport', 9.
- [20] See for example Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization*, 11–17 and Miller *et al.*, *Globalization and Sport*, 27–30.
- [21] Andrews and Jackson, 'Introduction', 5.
- [22] Michael Jardine, Letter to the *Independent*, 21 September 2005, 34. Emphasis added.
- [23] David Jenkins, 'The long and the short'. *Guardian*, 24 September 2005.
- [24] Zeigler, 'Yes way, Jose'.
- [25] Wagg, *The Football World*.
- [26] Daniel Taylor, 'Ferguson pulls down shutters as critics circle'. *Guardian* (Sport Section), 27 September 2005, 1.

- [27] Stephen Brook, 'Amex plays the football card with Mourinho'. *Guardian* (Media Section), 6 April 2005.
- [28] Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, 'He won, Russia lost.' [Profile of Roman Abramovich] *Guardian* (Weekend Magazine), 8 May 2004, 14–26.
- [29] Wagg, *The Football World*.
- [30] [http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/j/jose\\_mourinho\\_3967.php](http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/j/jose_mourinho_3967.php). INTERNET. Accessed on 29 September 2005.
- [31] John Cross and Darren Lewis. 'Forget the title race Arsene'. *Daily Mirror*, 17 September 2005, 76.
- [32] See, for example, Michie and Oughton, 'Competitive Balance in Football'.
- [33] *When Saturday Comes*, August 2005.
- [34] Caroline Frost, 'Roman Abramovich: Profile.' BBC4TV, 28 December 2003.
- [35] *Guardian*, 29 September 2005, 1.
- [36] Barclay, *Mourinho: Anatomy of Winner*.
- [37] Maguire, *Global Sport*, 22.
- [38] Starr, 'Jose Mourinho: Anti-Christ'.
- [39] Whannel, *Media Sport Stars*, 206–7.
- [40] <http://www.gdm93.dial.pipex.com/eriksson.htm>. INTERNET. Accessed on 2 October 2005.
- [41] See *News of the World*, 1 August 2004, 4; 8 August 2004, 2.
- [42] *The Guardian*, 27 July 2004, 28.
- [43] *The Observer*, 8 August 2004, 28.
- [44] *Daily Mail*, 4 August 2004, 4.
- [45] *The Observer*, 1 August 2004, 14.
- [46] *Guardian*, 3 August 2004, G2 Section, 7.
- [47] Wagg, 'The Missionary Position'.
- [48] *Daily Mail*, 4 August 2004, 4.
- [49] *Daily Mail*, 5 August 2004, 84–5.
- [50] BBC News, 8 September 2005.
- [51] Roy Greenslade, 'When dirty deals backfire'. *Media Guardian*, 9 August 2004, 4–5.
- [52] First printed in *The News of the World*, 1 August 2004, 3.
- [53] Greenslade, 'When dirty deals backfire', 5.
- [54] Denis Campbell and David Smith, 'The End of the Affair: How England fell out of love with Sven'. *The Observer*, 1 August 2004, 13.
- [55] *Daily Mail*, 5 August 2004, 88.
- [56] Paul Kelso, 'Critics demand sacking of FA head'. *The Guardian*, 3 August 2004, 1.
- [57] *The Independent*, 29 July 2004, 64.
- [58] *Guardian*, 'Thompson on the edge', 6 August 2004, 36.
- [59] Quoted in the *Guardian*, 9 August 2004, 14.
- [60] Steve Curry, 'So, who REALLY runs football in this country?' *Daily Mail*, 3 August 2004, 69.
- [61] *Ibid.*

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