

# The changing face of reporting

84/85

THERE WAS a time when Sunday newspapers carried football reports. That is not intended to be as cynical as it sounds, but in days gone by, Sunday newspapers did concentrate on the cut and thrust of the game, the goals, the turning points, the reasons for defeat and the justification of victory.

Where Watford FC was concerned, a handful of paragraphs would concentrate on their match fortunes in the lower divisions. On Monday morning, the goalscorers would be named, tucked on the end of a freshly-slanted report which would include a few words from the incumbent manager.

Things have changed. With Watford's rise has come the greater focus, the bigger coverage. This has coincided in a stepping up of the importance placed on managerial quotes.

The bulk of Sunday newspaper football reports are telephoned through to the office on the whistle . . . the final whistle. Early editions will feature these reports, but, while the type is being set, the reporter will hot-foot it down to the Press room to await the arrival of the managers.



Armed with their quotes he will then return to the Press box and telephone through brief versions of the managerial viewpoints and these will appear on the breakfast tables on Sunday mornings added to the earlier report.

After-match quotes used to be the province of the Monday morning national newspapers, but improved production techniques and the general need to be first with anything relevant on the game, has meant the increased involvement of Sunday newspapers in this sphere.

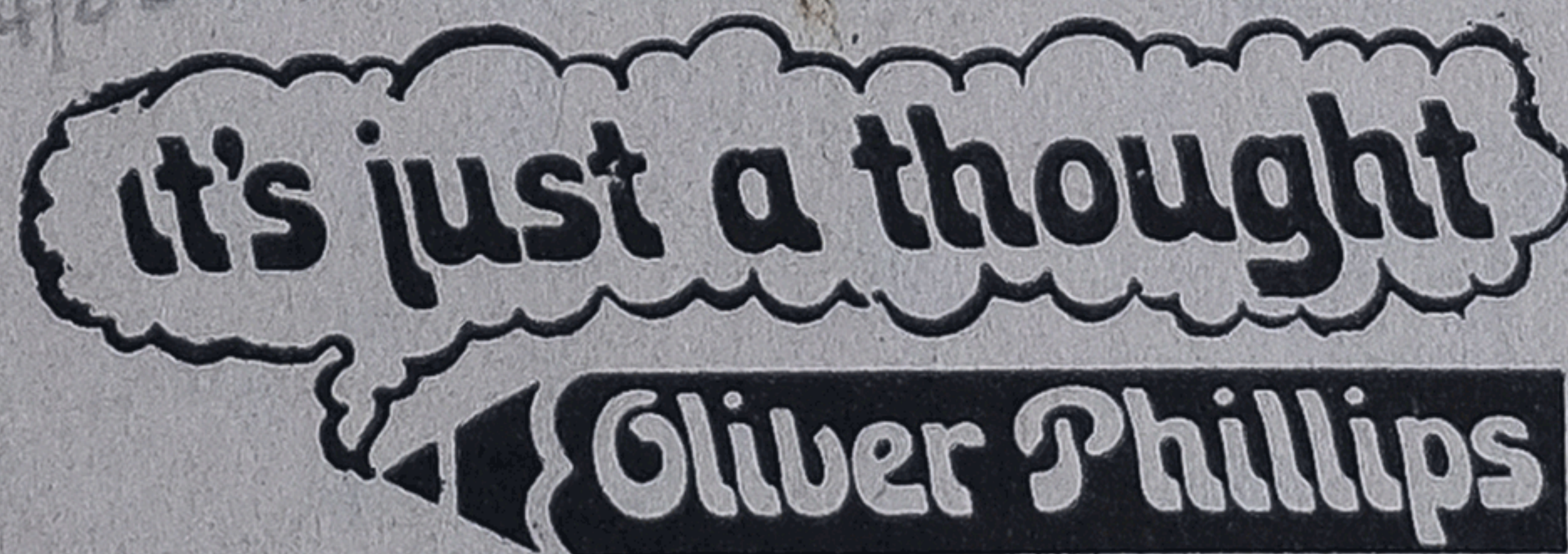
What then does the Monday morning newspaper man do? He sifts through the quotes to try and find some theme overlooked by the Sundays which he can develop?

This dilemma provokes a second Press conference of an impromptu nature. A few snatched words with the manager as he moves towards the coach preparing to leave

the ground or a lengthy vigil waiting for the home manager to head for his own home along with his family.

The search for something fresh occasionally goes over the top. Luton and Watford fans (and indeed Spurs' and Chelsea supporters) may have been a trifle puzzled in the past few weeks by some aspects of national newspaper reporting.

84/85 - AFTER 3-2 HOME WIN



Two weeks ago, after a comprehensive defeat at the hands of Spurs', David Pleat answered questions from a Monday newspaper journalist, following on from his own observations on the game at White Hart Lane.

It may have come as some surprise to Spurs' fans to find one national newspaper report on their victory over Luton was largely filled with a discussion on the negative aspects of Watford's style of play.

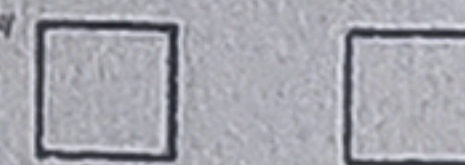
Similarly, the following week, after Watford had chalked up their first victory of the season, Chelsea fans may have been a trifle disappointed to see little mention of the penalty decisions which may have cost them the match. Instead, under the scoreline of Chelsea 2, Watford 3, they would have been amazed to find much of the "report" devoted to the likelihood of trouble in the Watford-Luton derby clash.

Graham Taylor was most certainly misquoted in this context while earlier in the month, Pleat's admittedly unsympathetic remarks on the subject of Watford's style, were used in a context somewhat removed from the original.

So, on Saturday at Kenilworth Road, both managers agreed

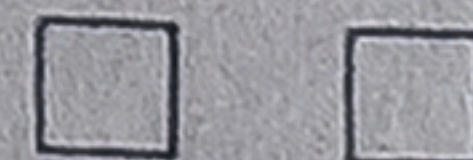
that they had received unfortunate publicity from Fleet Street and that, to quote one of them: "The art of football reporting is dead."

As a result, a brief statement was made in the Press room to the effect that neither manager would be appearing and that the Press had seen the game and could write their reports on what they had seen.



No obvious moments of controversy had been thrown up by the match so newspaper men followed their own avenues, in trying to obtain something fresh for Monday morning. One national newspaper never even mentioned the game. Another focused on the rebirth of Ricky Hill's form with appropriate quotes; another on Watford's hopes for survival in the view of Jake Findlay and another on the development of striker Steve Elliott.

Ironically Press conferences on match-days do provide a useful service. Reasons for substitution decisions, late team changes, disputed goals, etc, can all be clarified then. On Saturday, unbeknown to us all as we peered through the gaps between the many posts which obscure the pitch at Kenilworth Road and unhooked our trousers from the numerous nails in the woodwork, none of us credited Frankie Bunn with Luton's first goal. As a result Richard Jobson was given the blame throughout the weekend for neither manager appeared at the conference to reveal this significant item.



Ironical then that the managers' understandable reaction to the misuse of such conferences should hinder and obscure the valid reasons for which such conferences were held in the first place.