

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

THE phraseology of football is changing all the time. I was reminded of this some time ago, after West Ham's 3-1 win here. You may remember that their scorers wore shirt No's. 4, 5, and 6 and some reports made the point that the entire West Ham *half-back line* had got the goals. Ten years or so ago that would have been correct, but now it was a bit of journalistic licence—a phrase of numerical convenience rather than factual accuracy. Because in the modern game there is no such thing as a *half-back line*, except perhaps in the Tottenham programme, which still prints the teams in the old-fashioned formation of two backs, three half-backs and five forwards. Not that Spurs play that way on the field.

No, *half-back line* is obsolete. We no longer have a forward *line*, either. The only line, apart from the *goal-line*, *touchline* and *half-way line*, is the *back-four line*. The *centre-half* is well-nigh extinct: he's now the *centre-back*, and there are usually two of them instead of one. Your one-time *wing-half* is now a *midfield man*; *winger* is almost a forbidden term—but I'm willing to bet it'll come back; and if you still call the fellow in the No. 9 shirt a *centre-forward*, you're showing your ignorance. He's a *striker*, and so is anyone else who happens to be far enough upfield to put the ball where it belongs—in the enemy's net.

Only the goalkeeper keeps his identity, and that's because his is the one position specifically named in the Laws of the Game, which say: "A match shall be played between two teams, each consisting of not more than eleven players, one of whom shall be the goalkeeper."

In the long-ago reporting of the game, the goalkeeper was referred to as the *custodian*; the ball was the *leather*; the referee was the *man with the whistle*; half-time was *lemon-time*; and that stretch of grass out there in the middle was not the pitch (sorry . . . park)—it was the *lush, green sward*. It was all revived by a phrase I read recently in one of those Saturday night pink papers they do so well in the provinces. There it was, tucked away in the second half account of some minor match: *End to end play then ensued, each goal being visited in turn*. Lovely stuff recalling days when the second-half was the *second moiety*, the home side were the *homesters* . . . and Chelsea were, of course, the *Pensioners*.

Which sends me off at a slight tangent to another point. While the coverage of football by radio and television has advanced enormously, it has gone backward in the London evening papers on Saturday night. Outside the two or three main matches, there is hardly a second half paragraph to be seen anywhere. It's all to do with the rush to be on the streets within minutes of 5 p.m. Then how do the provinces manage to do a much more complete job, you may ask. The explanation is that they sell in a tight area, within a few miles of the town square or city centre, whereas on Saturday evening London's City end is comparatively deserted, and the papers must be rushed to suburban selling-points.

In all the hurry it's surprising there are not more misprints. Clearer telephone lines have helped, of course, or we might still be getting the sort of classic gaff that came over the phone from Wembley one pre-war Cup Final day. Setting the scene, the news reporter covering the match dictated: "After the teams had been presented to him, the King took his seat in the stand." At the other end of a badly distorted line, the copy-taker took it down on his typewriter as . . . "the King shook his feet in the sand."

Getting back to football phraseology, perhaps someone up there in the Chelsea Press box, looking for a bit of Christmas jollity, might like to have a shot at describing today's goals in tomorrow's paper in yesterday's terminology. Goals, of course, are the lifeblood of football and football reporting, so it will help if Ossie or Chris *suspends the spheroid in the rigging* a time or two!