

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

BEFORE the League Cup semi-final came to interrupt the train of thought, the question was posed on this page: What is Football going to do to solve the escalating problems of falling attendances and rising costs? I know what I would like it to do. The first requirement is to get the game right on the field, because everything stems from there and that is where, basically, the game is most wrong—in its approach. True, some clubs manage to play with flair away from home, but they are the exceptions. To draw away is still the criterion of most, and I believe the simplest and most effective way of changing tactical attitudes would be to award **THREE** points for an away win.

Stop away teams playing for a point by making victory so much more worthwhile and you will get two sides going out to attack instead of, usually, one. That must make a better spectacle, switching the emphasis from defence to attack, and spectacle is what the game needs. Bolton manager Jimmy Armfield rightly slammed away teams who play eight defenders in front of the 'keeper when he said: "They should give them a league of their own without goalposts and let them play *across* the pitch."

I would also like to see the indirect free-kick banished and every foul punished with a direct award. In the "area" that would mean more penalties, leading to more goals which, as we all know, is what Football wants. Come to think of it, whatever happened to penalties? Surely they ought to be more plentiful than bookings, yet in the whole of the First Division this season—we are now at the half-way stage—only 31 goals have been scored from the spot in a total of 218 matches, or one in every seven games. I know a few will have been missed, but shouldn't there be more than 40-odd offences worthy of penalties in four months' First Division play? The indirect free-kick "in the box" is too often a referee's get-out. Away with it.

What more is wrong with modern Football? There is too much of it. There must be when such a sage as Bill Shankly says, as he did after Liverpool and Spurs had drawn their League Cup-tie at Anfield on Monday night: "This was a dreadful result for both sides. Candidly, I wouldn't have minded if we'd lost. The pressure of games is too much on players, too ridiculous for words." It's too much on the fans, too. At increased costs of admission and travel, they cannot be expected to keep stumping up. Something has to give, and it will be interesting to see how today's attendance for Chelsea v. Norwich compares with Wednesday night's League Cup semi-final—the same match in a different wrapper.

The League's Pattern of Football which the clubs spurned ten years ago was on the right lines. And if Arsenal chairman Denis Hill-Wood says he is prepared here and now to vote for a reduction of the First Division to 18 clubs, the lead should be good enough for others. Indeed, why not 18 clubs in each of five divisions—First, Second, Third North, Third Midland and Third South—making a 90-club League in all? Unless many present Third and Fourth Division clubs are to go out of business in the next few years, they must surely regionalise soon. Shorter away trips, smaller travel costs, more crowd-pulling local derbies . . . you know it makes sense.

What else can Football do to help itself? Scrap meaningless tournaments like the Watney Cup, the Texaco Cup, the Anglo-Italian Cup . . . re-introduce a three-month close-season in summer, so that the fans are once again eager for the start of each new season . . . insist on a far more lucrative deal from the Pools (I suggest something like £10,000,000 a year for the use of fixtures instead of the absurd £900,000 received at present from an "offshoot" of Football that made its two biggest companies a combined £43,000,000 profit last year and paid the Government £56,000,000 in betting tax). And to counter the increasing danger of too much soccer appearing on the screens at home, Football must revise its deal with TV when the existing contracts expire at the end of season 1973-74.

Most of all, to finish on the field where we started, it must shift the emphasis from the destroyers and stoppers back to the stylists and goalscorers. And I think that awarding three points for an away win would do most to switch the vital area of the pitch away from midfield back to where it used to be. In the goalmouth.