

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

"CHELSEA WILL SPEND TWO MILLION POUNDS ON NEW PLAYERS IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS." How's that for a headline? There is no more fascinating subject for discussion than other people's money; **spending** someone else's money for them is a dreamy occupation most of us indulge in from time to time—and before Chelsea ask me what I'm doing spending two million of theirs, I'd better attempt an explanation, fast.

It's what has happened over the past ten years that leads me to predict what will happen in the next ten. For an analysis of the transfer business shows that, since August 1961, Chelsea have been Britain's biggest spending club. How much? One and a quarter million pounds, with Spurs a close second in the league of big buyers at £1,200,000. So, if the rate at which galloping inflation has overtaken the transfer market, particularly during these past 12 months, is maintained through the 1970s, is it not unreasonable to expect that Chelsea will spend another two million by 1981?

Jimmy Greaves would have been the first £100,000 player in the Football League when Tottenham brought him back from AC Milan in November 1961, except that Bill Nicholson didn't want our Jim labelled with a six-figure price-tag. He insisted on a pound change, so the Greaves fee stopped short at £99,999 and Denis Law became Britain's first hundred thousand pound signing (£115,000 in fact) the following July, when Manchester United bought him from Torino, who had paid Manchester City £100,000 for him a year before.

Today the £100,000 deal is no longer a novelty. Football has changed from team to squad football, with the increasingly commonplace situation of a costly star being in the squad but not the team and at times needing to play reserve football purely for match practice. Arsenal set the fashion of buying expensively for tomorrow when they paid Hibernian £100,000 for Peter Marinello. They announced it as a long-term buy, and at the time the talk around Highbury was that Marinello's arrival would mean the elbow for George Armstrong. It's not been much fun so far for Marinello, but Arsenal could say they've had their value for his fee out of Armstrong's better-than-ever form since.

That particular deal in January 1970 was Arsenal's last big trip into the transfer market. Since then, 15 players have moved at £100,000 or more (Keith Weller did so twice—see list below). A personal view is that so far Derby County have had the best value for money out of Colin Todd, but it doesn't do to judge these things too hastily. Remember Martin Chivers? First the struggle for form, then a serious knee injury put question-marks all over his £125,000 transfer from Southampton to Spurs, but in one of football's great success stories he came shining through last season and is playing even better now. I doubt if £250,000 would buy him today.

One point emerging from the names below is that they include only four full Internationals—Peters, Coates, Hennessey and Toshack. Others, no doubt, will reach that status; some may never rise above the "good club player" rating. Only time will tell. But if £100,000 sometimes buys no more than an average player, can you imagine what will happen if ever a **world-class** footballer becomes available; someone, say, with the genius and box-office magic of George Best. The bidding would have to start at half a million . . . but would any club be prepared to risk that sort of money on one pair of legs? And, by the way, while we're linked there to Manchester United, didn't every club with £60,000 in the bank miss one of the greatest-ever transfer bargains a year or so ago? That's all United were asking when Denis Law was on the list.

I said at the start that Chelsea had been football's heaviest spenders over the last ten years. But it hasn't been a £1½ million journey into the red. During the same period they have gathered in £1,244,000 from players transferred away from Stamford Bridge. In other words, they have broken even. On the same basis, they could spend that two million on new players during the next ten years and perhaps even show a profit in the transfer account!

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These have been the players transferred at £100,000 or more in the past 21 months: 1970—Feb., Terry Hennessey (Nott'm. F. to Derby); Mar., Martin Peters (West Ham to Spurs); May, Keith Weller (Millwall to Chelsea); Aug., Wilf Smith (Sheff. W. to Coventry); Oct., Henry Newton (Nott'm. F. to Everton); Nov., John Toshack (Cardiff to Liverpool); Dec., David Watson (Rotherham to Sunderland). 1971—Feb., Colin Todd (Sunderland to Derby) and Bryan Robson (Newcastle to West Ham); May, Ralph Coates (Burnley to Spurs) and Malcolm Macdonald (Luton to Newcastle); July, Jon Sammels (Arsenal to Leicester); Sept., Chris Garland (Bristol C. to Chelsea), Alan Birchenall (Crystal P. to Leicester), Steve Kember (Crystal P. to Chelsea) and Keith Weller (Chelsea to Leicester).