

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

AT this time of year more than any other we look forward, we look back. And in the looking back, it's good to think of the friends we've made, or met again, through football during the past year. Which is why I want to tell you about Rold, a Norwegian seaman who spent the two October Saturdays of his precious ten days' leave in London watching Spurs play Stoke and then Chelsea against West Bromwich Albion. For outside his family and the call of the sea, football is the great love of his life. British football. He's first officer aboard an 80,000-ton Norwegian tanker, and on the long voyages that take him across the world, to Japan and Trinidad, Australia and the Middle East, he spends most of his off-duty time studying, reading and researching British football.

At home in Norway he has a wife and three grown-up daughters. It's a family joke that when he telephoned all the way from the Persian Gulf to congratulate one of his daughters on her confirmation, his mind strayed somewhat from the subject while the call was being put through. When he was eventually connected, his first words were to ask how the local football team in Bergen were doing.

But football here is Rold's big sporting interest, and has been since, on various war-time ports of call (he was already on tankers then) he put in at places like Liverpool, Cardiff and Portsmouth. "This is the *real* football," he says. "In Norway we only play at it, while here it is a way of life. Perhaps by the time I retire from tankers I shall have won the Pools (he sends them in regularly on our matches). Then I will come and live here and start catching up on all the football I have missed through being so long at sea."

I met Rold at a house-party, and within minutes of our introduction he was revealing his encyclopaedic soccer knowledge by reciting the names of the original twelve clubs who formed the Football League . . . talking of Tottenham and Arsenal as the only teams to do the "double" this century . . . of his fascination for Everton and Sunderland and the high place they hold in the charts he keeps of long-serving First Division clubs. He talked of Tom Finney and Bobby Charlton . . . compared past and present Chelsea centre-forwards Tommy Lawton and Peter Osgood.

He had just one piece of shopping to do before he went back to sea three days later—a copy of the latest Rothmans Football Book "which will take up all my reading time aboard ship these next six months. I have the first two and must get the latest one." I slipped home for the spare copy I had, and presented it to him together with the new Observer Book of Football. I've never seen a grown-up so excited about a present (well, it isn't every day one is kissed on both cheeks by a Norwegian seaman!). He said it was like Christmas come two months early.

Now Christmas is past, the New Year is only hours away. I met Rold for no more than four hours that October night, and we may never meet again, yet I shall always count him among my friends, because he's a true friend of football. And as we cross the line into 1973 tomorrow night, I'll raise a glass to him, wherever he and his tanker may be on the oceans of the world.

Sail on, my friend; may the waves rise with you. And as you tune the ship's radio to BBC short-wave in search of the football results this evening and every Saturday night in the New Year, may you receive them loud and clear . . . with many a fine-sounding Chelsea score among them.