

By Albert Sewell

# BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

YOU won't find it actually written in the Laws of the Game, but it has always been generally understood that a player booked once in a match must take an early bath if he commits a second bookable offence in the same game. In one view, at least, this season's "new system" of refereeing has changed all that, and in future we need not be surprised to see someone cautioned twice in a game and still complete the 90 minutes. It was all brought to the surface by events in the Manchester United v. Leeds clash last Saturday with its 54,000 "live" crowd and a ten million audience on Match of the Day at night.

We saw Manchester United's Tony Dunne booked for the first time in his career—for handling the ball. Later we saw Leeds United's Norman Hunter committing a much more blatant handling offence and NOT being booked. Why? Because he had taken the precaution of previously getting his name taken for a midfield flare-up with Denis Law. No wonder Hunter smiled as the referee had those few words with him after *his* handling; he'd got away with an offence for which another player had been booked. And in that moment, witnessed by millions, I think Football, the League, the F.A. were brought to ridicule. That celebrated Dickensian character who observed "The law is a ass" may not have known much about football, but he certainly provided the quote that fitted this situation.

Speaking on the subject in Monday's *Daily Mirror*, Football League secretary Alan Hardaker said the referee had shown commonsense—"used his loaf"—in not sending off Hunter for handball after his earlier caution ("if that had happened, all hell would have been let loose"). Mr. Hardaker added that he didn't see why Hunter "shouldn't simply have been given a second booking—there's nothing in the Laws to say a referee must send a player off after a second caution. The basic trouble is the Laws themselves—they haven't been rewritten in fifty years, and it's time our law-makers got down to doing something about these discrepancies."

He can say that again. But why stop at two bookings in a game, lads? There's nothing in the Laws to say the referee must send you off after a third caution, either, so why not go for the whole row of lemons—and as long as you get them in the right order you'll still be out there on the park at the end of the game. What did you say, son . . . what's the "right order?"

Well, first you produce the real old-style physical foul—the crunching chop-down from behind. You've just got to be booked for that. Then how about a bit of time-wasting and pinching a few yards at a throw-in when you're leading 1-0 with twenty minutes to go? The ref. should book you for that, too—but surely he can't send you off for it? Finally, you do a "Tony Dunne" handling and, hey presto, you'll be booked again (only make sure it's not a "Norman Hunter" handling, or you won't!). And if you're lucky enough to have your match screened on television, you'll be able to see it again later, action replays and all.

The game is infinitely better this season for banishing the tackle from behind. It is poorer if the new edict says, in effect: "Book 'em for hands, but not if they've already been cautioned for something else—in that case, it's up to you, ref, to use your loaf." What happened at Old Trafford last Saturday suggests to me that it's time the League and the F.A. reconsidered the question of booking (or not booking) players for "hands." What was wrong with the old interpretation of cautioning a player for *persistent* handling? Or are we stuck with the sort of thing last Saturday's Manchester United-Leeds game produced?

It would be interesting to know what the League's official match assessor made of it. And what a good thing the TV cameras were there to bring such ridiculous inconsistency to public attention. If it had happened at Hartlepool and involved two unknown players before 2,015 spectators instead of at Old Trafford between internationals Dunne and Hunter and watched by 10,054,000 fans, we'd have heard nothing about it.

Then, as a Tuesday follow-up to the *Mirror's* Monday morning quotes from Mr. Hardaker, the *Daily Mail* threw more confusion into the issue. Ken Aston, chairman of the FIFA Referees' Committee, told them that players who commit two bookable offences in the same match must expect to be sent off. Said Mr. Aston: "If you have two offences, different in detail but both disregarding the spirit and authority of the Law, I would concur with Sir Stanley Rous that normally it would be unthinkable to caution a player twice without sending him off."

So what do we make of that? Well, before we all go mad, let Sir Stanley, the F.A., the League, the refs, the P.F.A. and anyone else who's relevant, get together and do what's got to be done—that is sort it all out. Then perhaps we can get on with the game.