

Advice to Journalists

CHECK, CHECK, CHECK

by Alan Hardaker

Secretary of the Football League

A PHRASE in a speech by Sir William Haley, Editor of "The Times", struck me as most interesting. Sir William claimed:

"The day of the Press being a circus is over. We should get back to our proper function, that of supplying information."

That sums up the position which often arises between the Press and football from time to time. Some of the newspapers are trying to make the news, not report it. I am, of course, primarily interested in the sporting side of the papers, when I make this statement. Let me say bluntly, that if I had the chance of ordering a new charter for football writers, these are some of the instructions I would give:

Learn your game, and check your facts.

Stop stirring up trouble among players.

Stop visiting them at home, suggesting dissatisfaction where often none exists.

Stop offering players big money for an "attack" story, an attack usually launched against authority, in the shape of the Football Association or Football League.

Stop making personal attacks on the private lives of legislators (i.e. just because Mr. X is a greengrocer, it is implied that he knows nothing about a game to which he has perhaps devoted forty years).

Cut out the continual reference to the so-called battle for power between the Football Association and League, often reduced to a personality struggle between the Football Association Secretary, Sir Stanley Rous, and myself.

Stop employing part-time representatives among the players and officials of clubs, who pass on information.

If you are invited into a Club Board Room as a guest, and overhear some in-

formation, don't repeat it without getting the permission of the people concerned.

Sometimes I feel that the papers forget what is good for the game in their efforts to find a sensational story to sell their newspapers. Maybe it is not always the fault of the reporter. His advisors may take a line on a story which is not strictly true, but sensational. After all, they reason, the truth is often dull! A reporter who writes on football should make a close study of the Rules of the Football Association and the Regulations of The Football League. They should get to know how the two bodies work, and what they stand for. Then perhaps we would lose sight of two of the most common errors I read from time to time in the papers:—"The Football Association have approved the payment of a benefit to Player X" . . . it is The League who sanctions the payment of benefits. And, "So-and-so has been placed on the transfer list during the playing season" . . . no player can be placed on the transfer list until the end of the season.

The Football League and its organization work for football, and are available to the Press to all reasonable enquiries. Reasonable, I said. Not when I am aroused at home at 2 a.m. by a newspaper representative saying: "I have heard something about a Fourth Division club. It is not important, but would you like to comment" I did comment, and very nearly had my telephone taken away!

During the last couple of years, the feeling between the Press and the Football League has undergone a great change. There is much more friendly outlook. Let us hope it gets even better. We are all in this game together for the good of it, I hope. If the Press want co-operation from The League and the Clubs, then we have the right to expect the same sort of co-operation from the Press.

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