

By Albert Sewell

# BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

SOMETIMES the *Footballer of the Year* just about picks himself; at others one is not entirely convinced that the Football Writers' choice would be the fans' nomination, because situations (League Championship climaxes and Cup Finals) have been known to creep in and swing the voting at the expense of individual performance over the whole season. There can be little doubt, though, about the right fellow receiving the trophy at the Cafe Royal a week on Thursday. This is the 25th year of the award and if, by way of celebration, the silver jubilee called for an extra special winner, then who better than Gordon Banks? On reflection, it's astonishing that he has not previously won the title—he's been the world's No. 1 goalkeeper for years now—but then goalkeepers do not figure prominently in the list of past winners. Bert Trautmann, in 1956, is the only one.

Banks more than any other Stoke player prevented Chelsea winning the League Cup at Wembley last month, and in view of his latest award I'm sure all you sporting Chelsea fans will salute him tonight . . . assuming, that is, he's playing and not taking a rest after Stoke's recent run of six games in 18 days. He's got to learn his speech some time!

Just as most comedians yearn to play Hamlet, so most goalkeepers want to play outfield—at least in the occasional training spell—so it was interesting to hear Bobby Charlton say recently, when paying tribute to Banks's supreme skills, that in all the years he's known him he has never seen Gordon anywhere but between the posts. "Brilliant as he is, he just wants to go on practising and getting better at his particular job," said Bobby. Dedication and professionalism like this have made Banks what he is . . . but don't let it stop the Chelsea lads trying to stick a couple past him tonight.

If Gordon Banks is *Footballer of the Year*, the *Crowd of the Year* has got to be Liverpool's. If not for the way they've helped Bill Shankly's men in their phenomenal late rush towards the Championship, then the Kop and all the rest who fill Anfield earned the accolade two weeks ago. On a pelting night 56,214—another 5,000 were locked out—turned up to honour their former star Roger Hunt in his testimonial match. And that for a player who left the club three seasons ago. Marvellous people!

*Manager of the Year*? Like the *Footballer of the Year*, he could be among us tonight—hasn't Tony Waddington done miracles with Stoke this season?—unless Leeds do the Double under Don Revie.

That would make Leeds *Team of the Year*. Otherwise Hartlepool deserve consideration . . . and I'm not joking. Not many people outside the North-east have noticed what they've been up to lately. On the day Chelsea and Stoke met at Wembley, only seven weeks ago, Hartlepool stood 92nd in the Football League. They'd applied for re-election for the past two seasons and were relegated the year before that . . . and if anyone was going to have to make room for Hereford to come into the League this summer it was surely Hartlepool. Then they started winning, and could hardly stop. They've had eight victories and a draw in their last twelve games. Yes, for a club who've had to seek re-election ten times in their history, it borders on *Team of the Year* rating.

On that fairy-story note, farewell until next season. And as you leave Stamford Bridge tonight, take a last look at the East Stand that's been here almost as long as there's been a Chelsea Football Club. Say goodbye to old George Hilsdon, that roof-top weather-vane figure who's looked down on matters Chelsea for more than half a century. For this is the end of an age. By the time we gather again in August the East Stand won't be here. As you are about to hear soon, its super-successor will be under construction. Till then . . . go well, keep well and summer well.