

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

AFTER having substitutes for seven seasons in our domestic football, there is not much doubt that the system has worked well and to the benefit of the game. When substitutes were introduced at the start of season 1965-66, fears were expressed that unscrupulous managers or coaches might "invent" injuries in order to replace an off-form player—and some did—but this was soon remedied by changing the regulation to read "a club may, at its discretion, use one substitute player at any time in a match. . . ."

Now I suggest we are ready for another amendment, to permit a second replacement—in goal. The point was thrown up again in last Saturday's F.A. Cup quarter-final at Birmingham, where Huddersfield lost David Lawson directly after half-time. Inevitably, as he was carried off on a stretcher, his team's semi-final hopes went with him. "An experienced goalkeeper might well have prevented Birmingham's second and third goals," reported Monday's *Daily Telegraph*.

It is ludicrous that while any one of the ten outfield players can be substituted at any time for any reason (bar sending-off), if the one truly specialist player on the field, the goalkeeper, is injured, he can only be replaced in makeshift fashion. Maybe it's asking too much for 92 League clubs to pack a spare goalkeeper in the kit-skip for every one of 42 or more League games per season. In any case, in the League there's always next week, but Cup football, by its very essence of instant death, presents a special case.

Take, for example, past Cup experiences of the two goalkeepers in action here today. Two years ago, when Chelsea won the F.A. Cup Final replay against Leeds at Old Trafford, Peter Bonetti played an hour of normal time and then the extra half-hour virtually on one leg. If the injury to the other knee had been just one degree worse he would have had to leave the field for good. I've no doubt Dave Webb would have made a fair fist of things between the sticks, but against a team of Leeds' calibre could Chelsea have hoped to bring home the Cup with an outfield player in goal for so long? Webby certainly wouldn't have been at the other end of the field to head the winner, would he?

And take West Ham's Bobby Ferguson. Two months ago, in the final episode of the four-match League Cup semi-final marathon against Stoke at Old Trafford, he was carried off concussed after 14 minutes. He returned still dazed 20 minutes later, against the Manchester United doctor's advice, and instinctively went through the goalkeeping motions for the rest of the game. At the end he didn't know it was over or the result. While Ferguson was off, Bobby Moore went in goal. So West Ham were hit not once, but twice by that injury—they lost a specialist in goal and they lost Moore in his role of commander-in-chief defence.

The goalkeeper is a very special animal. A centre-forward can miss three open goals and still finish hero of the day by scoring in the last minute; your goalkeeper does not survive one major error in ten. For years goalkeeper substitutes have been permitted in friendly Internationals. They are now accepted in the three big European club tournaments. As the F.A. Cup reaches its centenary this year, let's hope we don't have to wait another century before injured goalies can be properly replaced. The Football League might like to consider taking the initiative in their own Cup . . . and next season wouldn't be too soon.