

GREATEST LIVING ENGLISHMEN

“I’m not the Greatest Living Englishman but I am in the top one”

Brian Clough won the League Cup, the European Cup and the First Division title, now you’ve given him his biggest accolade yet

The competition was brutal. Last issue we presented you with *loaded*’s 100 Greatest Living Englishmen, a list compiled by writers of this very magazine over the last 20 years. A selection, we add, that included such icons as Spike Milligan, Peter Cook and, of course, the Honey Monster. But when we asked you to vote for your all-time favourite, you thankfully shied away from such banana skins as Billy ‘Wonga’ Wright and instead chose a man so great that he frankly made Churchill look a little incompetent.

“I’m sure the England selectors thought if they took me on and gave me the job, I’d want to run the show. They were shrewd because that’s exactly what I would have done,” snarled Brian Clough while reflecting on why he never got the biggest job in English football. And it’s that line that perhaps best reflects quite why Cloughie was a genuine icon. He was cocky, obnoxious, hilarious, bitter, charming, witty, and at times downright nasty. After taking Derby from nothing to becoming league champions, the FA decided to overlook him in 1977 for safe option Ron Greenwood. And Cloughie rammed that decision down their throats by performing that miracle feat *again* by guiding Nottingham Forest from near relegation from the second division to becoming European Cup winners. Twice. And that’s forgetting the 250 goals he scored in 296 games as a striker.

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For Clough, those trophies were less about the satisfaction of winning, and more about putting two fingers up at those that doubted him. “If you’re a club manager, and only a club manager, the way you can partly play at being an international is to win the European Cup”, he explained to Duncan Hamilton, his biographer in the superb *Provided You Don’t Kiss Me*. “All hope had gone for me and the England job by then. If I wasn’t getting it in ‘77, I was never getting it. All I had left was the European Cup. Winning it was my equivalent of the World Cup. Not many managers do *that* twice.” Short on confidence he wasn’t, but Clough’s self-belief, hell outright arrogance, spurred his teams on. “I wouldn’t say I was the best manager in the business”, he famously quipped, “but I was in the top one.” And Old Big Head really was.

Along with his assistant Peter Taylor, the brains behind his shrewd transfer dealings, Clough transformed teams by instilling his own bullet-proof confidence in the players while teaching them to play football by passing, and not hoofing, the ball. “All I want is for that ball to brush the grass – just pass it around. We don’t want smart arses. We want players who will do things simply and quickly and when they’re told.” When interviewed about his training technique, he talked about how he used to return the ball when it went out of play, “I aim at the bollocks. It keeps ‘em on their toes.”

But despite his success at Derby, it was his remarkable feat at Forest that he is most remembered for. Their home, The City Ground, was a dilapidated bank of uncovered terraces at one end

and a low, rattling tin roof at the other when he arrived, while the city itself was populated by struggling working-class miners on the brink of being ravished by Margaret Thatcher. “Hope is all I can offer,” said Clough to the waiting press when he took over. “There is only one thing in the club’s favour now. It’s got me.” Despite a terrible first season (“We could have been relegated. We’d have almost deserved it too. We were useless”), he guided the club to promotion in his second year as boss by finishing third. And then, incredibly, to the league title in his first season in the top flight. Crucially though nearly half his team were the same set of men that looked awful under former managers in the second division.

In fact the only blip on his illustrious career was the 44 days he spent at Leeds, where, after guiding Derby to glory, he got to take over from his old nemeses Don Revie. Clough detested the club and their boring yet brutal brand of football. After arriving at his first training session, he told the players, “As far as I’m concerned, you can throw all your medals in the bin because you got them from cheating.” After getting the sack, and a gigantic payout, he appeared with the former Leeds manager on a TV chat show where he ripped Revie to shreds. “I wanted to do something you hadn’t done, to win the league but I wanted to win it better than you,” blasted Clough. When Revie reminded him that they only lost four matches in his last season he retorted, “Well, I could only lose three.”

Cloughie loved a drink though, and this increased addiction, contributed to his demise and, most probably, his early death. “Brian Clough drank to celebrate. He drank to lift himself out of a dark corner. He drank because he was bored. He drank to forget. Finally he drank because he forgot what he was drinking for,” wrote Duncan Hamilton. His final game as manager at the City Ground saw the team relegated with the manager a shadow of his former self, yet the crowd cheered his name and invaded the pitch when it was all over. “Can I have a word,” a desperate reporter asked him at the end. He replied, “Of course. Goodbye.” ■ **loaded**

loaded will be unveiling its 101st Greatest Living Englishman next issue. Nominate by tweeting @loadedmag. Provided You Don’t Kiss Me, by Duncan Hamilton, is in all good bookshops.



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