

By Albert Sewell

# BETWEEN OURSELVES

*Programme Editor*

**G**OOD afternoon. And here, by way of a change from all that we've been reading and hearing about the game lately, is the **GOOD** news on the football front. Lots of it. For a start, some 1,050 footballers appeared for the 92 League clubs last week-end and 1,000 of them did **NOT** get booked. Wasn't that good? Yes, but it was the other four dozen who made the news. And of the 46 referees in charge of those games, 44 did **NOT** need to send anyone off. Wasn't that good? And for the third successive Saturday there wasn't a goalless match in the First Division. Good for the game? Of course it was.

More than 580,000 spectators turned out, and at the end of the afternoon all but a handful of them had **NOT** been arrested. Wasn't that good? And the big majority of clubs staging the week-end's League programme did **NOT** report punch-ups on the terraces. (Which is not to say the day was entirely unsoiled by the hooligan element—for example Chelsea players and officials, arriving at Birmingham New Street, were spat upon and verbally abused by a moronic section of Manchester United followers who were spilling out of the station at the same time, en route to West Bromwich.)

Almost non-stop for two months the media have been headlining the slump in attendances. O.K., so it's happened, but constantly harping on it will not solve the problem . . . only heighten it by conditioning more people to staying away. If it continues, perhaps the Football League will order clubs not to announce attendance figures for a test period, just as the Ministry of Transport stopped issuing Christmas and Bank Holiday road death statistics because their effect was more harmful than beneficial.

About soccer's present problems, wasn't it time that someone said what Fulham manager Alec Stock was saying just the other day? Listen to some good sense: "If you are running a shop," said Alec, "you don't advertise the worst of your products, do you? Public relations means showing the smile on your face, not your hangovers. Here we are in the middle of a great hiatus about attendances, and is it so surprising when such big voices have been telling the public that we are presenting a dirty show?"

"Telling us that we are infested with dirty players, that many are layabouts, that the game is little good. It's a funny thing about hooliganism. A year ago I thought football had it under control. You never seemed to notice it around any longer. Now it's back again. Do we not help it back by painting our own house so black?"

"Minority statistics seem to govern opinions. The statistics I have studied show that the majority of players and games are on the right side of the line . . . There should be far more faith in the professionals, the people who love the game and want to see it survive, not disintegrate. Let's shout about the values of our national sport. There **ARE** plenty, you know. If I didn't think so, I'd quit working in football tomorrow."

Well spoken, Alec, and as I see it, there's not really much wrong with football that a little less of it won't put right. Let's return to a proper close season with no football played on our League grounds between May and August and no football on our TV screens either after the last of the season's Internationals and the European Cup Final.

Let's get back to a state of mind in which everyone is eager for the start of a new season. Let the authorities realise that the fans' appetite needs to be whetted, and not destroyed by such publicly unwanted competitions as the Watney Cup, the Texaco Cup, the Anglo-Italian Cup and now, heaven help us, a proposed end-of-season cup for Third and Fourth Division clubs. Please, please, Football League, leave some time for the grass to grow . . . and for the fans' enthusiasm for each new season to grow with it.