

Sir Stanley Rous and the growth of world football: an Englishman abroad

by Alan Tomlinson, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, xiv+341pp., £64.99 (hardback), ISBN 1-5275-5887-8

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BOOK REVIEW

Sir Stanley Rous and the growth of world football: an Englishman abroad, by Alan Tomlinson, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, xiv+341pp., £64.99 (hardback), ISBN 1-5275-5887-8

In 2016, the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* opened the FIFA World Football Museum in Zurich. One of its exhibits is titled 'Sir Stanley Rous: The Lawman' and notes the Englishman as a leading football referee and the only FIFA President to officiate an international match. Alan Tomlinson's *Sir Stanley Rous and the Growth of World Football: An Englishman Abroad* is a long-awaited contribution to understanding Rous as more than just a 'Lawman'. Tomlinson acknowledges that his 'bordering on the voyeuristic' (p. 268) and 'close to obsessive concern with studying Rous' (p. xiv) has kept him occupied for 35 years. While this publication is an excellent biography of Sir Stanley Rous, Tomlinson is concerned with 'social mobility, educational and religious legacies' (p. xii) more generally. To his credit, Tomlinson's scholarly output has often been interdisciplinary in nature and this publication is no different. This is a good example of the usefulness of historical sociology in his analysis of Rous. He acknowledges the invaluable access Rous's longtime Personal Assistant/Secretary, Rose-Marie Breitenstein has played over close to 25 years, in providing access to the Private Papers of Sir Stanley Rous in her possession.

Tomlinson shows how Rous, born into a respectable working-class family was able to move into the elite strata of British society over the course of his lifetime. Tomlinson delves into Rous's college essays from 1920 that provide fascinating reading and insights. Even then, Rous was inclined to seek the 'middle way' (p. 57), always 'looking for consensus, [and] playing the diplomat and the conciliator' (p. 59), an early indication of the style he later adopted at the FA and FIFA. Tomlinson tracks Rous's rise from referee to Secretary of the FA. His European referring experiences brought 'an explicit internationalist dimension' (p. 76) along with 'football education and referee development' that signified a 'gentle revolution in the FA' (p. 77). Rous's work was not limited to the FA: he began his three-decade long involvement with the Central Council of Physical Recreation in 1935. For Tomlinson he was 'a competent administrator, an innovator, an internationalist and increasingly public figure' (p. 84). This public persona was further consolidated when he was awarded a CBE in 1943 and a knighthood in 1949.

After World War Two, Rous took the FA back into FIFA. While encouraging football internationalism, he also stressed the importance of decentralised administration evidenced by his involvement in the formation of the *Union des Associations Européennes de Football* (UEFA). This formed part of Rous's broader diplomatic outlook in the context of a post-war Europe in which a 'a

new spirit of co-operation ... for healing old animosities' was central (p. 113). While Tomlinson views Rous in broadly positive terms, he also notes that he could be both 'unscrupulous' and 'patronising' (p. 115), and that he displayed 'a degree of paranoia [and] aggression' in meetings (p. 116). While Rous was clearly comfortable in a wide range of settings and environments, able to adapt and be interested, he was also 'a social climber, taking every opportunity that came his way to re-affirm his establishment credentials' (p. 124) particularly after his knighthood.

Tomlinson charts Rous's ascent to the presidency of FIFA in 1961. While he suggests that Rous was patient, diplomatic and decisive in dealing with the dynamics of continental confederations, he failed to foresee the power games and geopolitical agendas across global football. After England hosted and won the World Cup in 1966, the 71-year-old Rous could have retired at the height of his powers with his reputation intact. The standout performance of Mozambiquan born Eusebio, who starred for Portugal during the 1966 tournament, often overshadows the fact that African nations, bar South Africa, boycotted the qualifying rounds of the event. Tomlinson discusses this episode in detail and highlights the limitations of Rous's presidency at the helm of world football in Chapter 12. These are also exposed in Chapter 11 with apartheid South Africa and its membership of FIFA. Here Tomlinson suggests that Rous's 'consensus-seeking strategies' were tested to the limit; Rous 'could not credibly, with this level of involvement and ingrained networking with the white football establishment, claim to be objective, open-minded and balanced in evaluating the situation' (p. 180). This assessment downplays the long relationship between the FA and the Football Association of South Africa (FASA) that predates Rous.

FASA was an honorary member of the FA from 1897. The FA sent five representative teams to tour the country up until 1956 and prior to World War Two, the largest group of foreign players in league football in England and Scotland, outside of Britain and Ireland, were South Africans. Five members of the 1966 England winning side played in apartheid South Africa over the following decade. Tomlinson cites a letter written by Vivian Granger, general manager of the whites-only National Football League in South Africa in which it was suggested a 'non-white' team could be entered into the 1966 World Cup, rightly calling it 'one of the most absurd proposals in the history of international sport' (p. 189). Rous, however, is let off the hook too easily in a subsequent paragraph when Tomlinson argues that, in the absence of any available record of his response to this preposterous proposal, 'we might credit Rous with the sensible decision to simply ignore the Granger plan' (p. 190). Yet in 1963, FASA re-applied to the *Confédération Africaine de Football* (CAF) for membership on FIFA's, and in all likelihood Rous's suggestion. FASA had been a founding member of CAF in 1956 but was expelled in 1960. Moreover, FASA did enter a 'non-European' team (managed by former English amateur international Jack Gibbon) into the qualifying rounds of the 1966 World Cup in the group with Australia, South Korea and North Korea.


In the short three chapters that make up the final part of the book, Tomlinson calls Rous a 'man for all seasons' (p. 252), recalling achievements beyond

football, while also claiming that he was ‘without doubt a principled visionary’ particularly in relation to football governance in England and abroad (p. 261). In a fascinating concluding chapter, titled ‘Finding Rous’, Tomlinson raises important methodological considerations. He states, ‘Writing of this kind is a giant act of interpretation’, quoting Virginia Woolf – ‘there are some people who without being themselves famous seem to sum up qualities of an age and to represent it at its best’ – to good effect (p. 268).

Tomlinson’s very useful biography of Rous is a fascinating interpretation of a complex sports administrator who was clearly more than a ‘Lawman’. Rous was born at the height of the British Empire. He was centrally involved in the unraveling of that empire in the world of football, while perched in the upper echelons of British society. Tomlinson draws from an impressive list of primary sources and in particular, Rous’s private papers which form the backbone of much of the analysis in this book. Very few researchers have had the privilege of accessing these papers. It seems as if they might have found a home with FIFA in Zurich. This will allow a new generation of researchers and scholars to interpret and ‘find’ Sir Stanley Rous and his contribution to football in England and across the world in different ways.

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