

FROM THE BOARDROOM TO THE BOOTROOM...

GAME CHANGERS

INSIDE
ENGLISH
FOOTBALL



ALAN CURBISHLEY

Alan Curbishley

**Game Changers: Inside
English Football: From the
Boardroom to the Bootroom**

«HarperCollins»

Curbishley A.

Game Changers: Inside English Football: From the Boardroom to the Bootroom / A. Curbishley — «HarperCollins»,

Alan Curbishley has spent a lifetime in football both as a fan, player and manager. In his forty years, he has seen the game he loves change beyond all recognition. The money, the media, the celebrity culture, the agents – when Curbishley began his playing career in 1975, no one could have foreseen a future in which television rights sold for £10 billion. Through incredible access to the biggest names in the game, he takes a look at the modern game in all its guises, from the chairmen and chief executives at the very top to managers and players and all the way to the fans and ground staff. On the way, we hear from an eclectic and colourful cast of characters and some true legends of the sport, old and new: Arsène Wenger, Stevie Gerrard, Frank Lampard, Rio Ferdinand, Harry Redknapp, Harry Kane. This is a truly unique football book, written by one of the most respected and well-connected men in the sport. Never before has such an array of talent been collected within the pages of one book – it will spark discussion, enliven arguments and throw fire onto the debate: as the game changes, does it change for the better?

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Dedication

To all football fans up and down the country who support their teams through thick and thin.
I hope this book gives you an insight into the game we all love.

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Introduction

I can't remember exactly when I became hooked on football, but I'm sure like many other kids it happened at a very young age. In fact I don't recall a time when football wasn't part of my life. It just seems to have always been there.

I've been lucky enough to have been able to play the game professionally and continue in the sport as a coach and manager, but before all of that came along I was first and foremost a football fan. I still am. I was born and brought up close to Upton Park, and becoming a West Ham fan was never really in question for me or any of my mates. It was the club we all supported and the one we all hoped to be able to play for one day. I was fortunate to be considered good enough to train with them when I was a youngster, and privileged enough to be given match tickets to their home games. These were little green vouchers that allowed us to stand just behind where the dugouts were later positioned at the stadium. I would always try to make my way to the North Bank behind one of the goals and watch the matches from there. I remember some memorable matches looking on from those terraces, like the day Geoff Hurst scored six goals, including the first one, which he punched into the net, in an 8–0 win against Sunderland in 1968. I also watched on in despair as a great Manchester United side inflicted a 6–1 defeat on the Hammers in 1967, the season the visitors went on to win the league. So later on in my life being able to actually play for the club and manage – it was something special.

Having the good fortune to be professionally involved in the game for most of my life has given me an insight into the workings of football in this country, and during that time I have seen the game grow, change and evolve from those matches I watched as a youngster in the 1960s to the industry it now is. I wanted to go behind the headlines and the general media coverage to try to shed some light on exactly what happens in the game. To interview the sort of people who are part of the fabric of the modern game in this country, and who play, or have played, important roles in what football is now about.

There are some very familiar names included, but equally there are others who are not so well known, and perhaps some who are not known at all outside of the game. However, they all share something in common, and that's football. There are many people involved in the game and who earn their living from it. They are part of what modern football is about, and although it would have been impossible to include everyone who plays a part, I have tried to speak to people who I believe can shed some light on the workings of the game at the top in this country.

Supporters see their favourite team or player running out onto the field each week, but might not have any idea about those involved in making sure that can happen – people such as the coaches, the medical and sports science team, the player liaison officers and the kit men. They all play their part, and that is why I have tried to talk to a broad cross-section of people from the boardroom to the bootroom.

Things are always changing in football, with managers, players and others involved in the game moving on or changing clubs. The vast majority of the interviews I conducted took place in 2015, with the others happening in the early part of 2016. Although circumstances may have changed for some of the people I spoke to at the time, I hope the relevance of what they told me and the candid way in which they were prepared to speak about their roles within the game give the sort of insight that fans will be interested in.

Football at the highest level might now be an industry, but at the same time it is still a very simple game with very simple rules. The drama, spectacle, excitement, happiness and sadness that come along with it make it special for those of us who love it. Once you're hooked, football becomes an addiction – and it stays with you for life.

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