

OPINION

'MATCH OF THE DAY' - TIME FOR CHANGE?

Gary Lineker was a great footballer. Most of the time the writer would have watched him playing for England on TV, and not only playing but scoring some vital goals too. He was seen live once and obliged with two goals for Leicester City in a 5-1 romp over Coventry City at the old Filbert Street ground in December 1984. It is agreed that former England manager Graham Taylor's decision to substitute him during the 1992 Euro's was an incorrect one and led to our elimination at that time. *The photo shows Gary Lineker in his Leicester City days.*



Lineker has been the anchor-man for the BBC flagship programme *Match of the Day* (MoTD) for many years since retiring from the game. MoTD on 11th March 2023 has been watched, well it was supposed to be MoTD but was rebranded as 'Premier League Highlights'. It showed footage of the six matches played that day without a presenter, pundits or commentary, condensing a programme that is usually ninety minutes (and a quite apt time period!) into just twenty. All that could be heard was the noise of the crowd. There were also no partisan post-match manager interviews and statistics showing various figures, including XG, which the writer has tried to understand but has only led to even more confusion. The 'whys and wherefores' of the reasons this programme was broadcast that way will not be written about here.



Must say that this twenty-minute 'Premier League Highlights' programme was enjoyable! A good time perhaps for the BBC to review the way it covers football and ship out many of the people, men and women, who regularly appear or can be heard on their usual football programmes but have stood down this weekend. Let's replace them with a less smug presenter who only seems to want to remind viewers that he played too and fewer pundits who only want to talk about the top teams and, in the limited time left, be hyper critical of the others. The calibre of the commentators should also be considered too (this will be explained).

Whilst this revised version of MoTD was enjoyed, a commentary would have been preferred though, but not the 'modern day version' which tends to consist of ninety percent drive! It seems that commentators of today have just got to keep talking, some talking at us, showing us they know what they're talking about and need to justify their knowledge by 'explaining' to us. They talk to us in a manner that suggests they think we don't have a clue. Let's face it, football is a fairly simple game which is one reason why it is such a popular sport, not only in the UK, but all around the world. Whilst players are passing the ball around they aren't telling us which player is in possession, often bamboozling us about their supposed superior knowledge of the game. We (the viewers) are looking at the pictures after all, so we can form our own opinions about what's going on, we just need to know who.

The importance placed on commentators on MoTD is (and again a personal view) epitomised by a typical 'normal' programme. Had it been shown in the 'normal' way, Everton v Brentford would probably have been the final game. Lineker would have set the scene, with giant badges of the teams in the background and tell us the commentator was, to pick a random one, Simon Brotherton. The players would be shown emerging onto the pitch with names of the starting line-up for both teams rolling across the bottom of the screen. They would then start showing the action at a random time and up pops a graphic to the top left showing "Commentator: Simon Brotherton" that disappears and up would pop another in the same place "Referee: Simon Hooper" (who was the referee of that game incidentally). This suggests the commentator is more important than the official! Brotherton has already been introduced by Lineker, why does he need to be shown again and before the referee's name? The case is rested there.

But wasn't it stated that a commentary would have been preferred? Yes, but how about one like David Coleman (*pictured right*), now long departed, who in my favourite FA Cup final back in 1976 said – "McCalliog to Stokes who is onside, one-nil!". No more was needed (having been present at that match, the commentary was later heard and many more times since). Would a modern-day version of that commentary have been as simple as that? Probably not.



Commentators now also don't know when to keep silent; it's almost as though they have to provide the entertainment, perhaps to make up for dull possession play exhibited by a team in their own half or around the half-way line (but it looks impressive on those post-match stats, even though that team might have lost 2-0!).



Once again, a personal view but John Motson (*pictured left*), who very recently passed away, was the first 'chatty' commentator but even he has been 'eclipsed' by the likes of most of the present-day people who should feel honoured to be able to hold the same position. At least John did tell the viewer who had possession of the football in between the chatter; he also commented with a degree of humour.

Does working for the BBC as a football commentator actually seem like going to work? Surely even having to do some pre-game research would prove to be enjoyable. There's a possibility that a commentator could be sent to a game they didn't really want to cover, but even then, they would normally have one of the best seats in the house, which should really make up for any disappointment!

But of course, MoTD will all go back to 'normal' with or without Lineker presenting (with his glib comment in closing the show), with or without Alan Shearer, 'Wrighty', Danny Murphy etc. etc. We will still get the same commentators, 'JP', Vicki Sparks or the aforementioned Simon Brotherton, just to take a few examples. The managers will come on saying how they deserved to win or were unlucky to lose, and those stats will be shown (including the XG of 1.63 for one team and 0.76 for the other) and then the analysis follows before the next game is shown.

Yes, whilst it is understood that not everyone would share the same view, it's time to make that programme no longer than an hour, cut down the chatter and just show the viewer the best of the football games played on that day, with a fairly anonymous commentary alongside and treat the Southamptons and Brentfords of this world with equal time and respect as the Man Citys and Uniteds. Will it happen? Not a chance!! But if there was a time to do it then this is certainly it.

(Oh, and in case the reader might think the writer is an 'ITV merchant' then "no-siree" because they are worse! They tell the viewer to "Don't go away, we'll be back in a minute" and then offer a chance to have 'fifty free spins' just before a live match kicks off!! Let's not go there further).

Compiled on 11th March 2023

Foot(ball) Note: Posts are seldom put onto the webpage until they've been read and re-read so it is now the following day (Sunday) and I have just watched Chelsea v Manchester United in the Women's Super League. There were none of the 'usual' people (mainly women, of course) presenting, punditry and commentating (and co-commenting) on the game. Instead, there was a single commentator shown as 'World Feed Commentator' called Nigel Adderley, who was more 'old school' than others. Nigel's commentary brought another thought provoking aspect and that is why does it normally take two to usually do it? He was more than capable of presenting it as a sole commentator and did it very well indeed. If it had been 'normal' coverage then it would probably have been two commentators who wouldn't between them had covered it anywhere near as well. A case of quality rather than quantity. It's just an opinion but a further example of why changes should be made. I know, there is always the 'off' button, but I enjoy watching the actual football!

