This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document, This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Football and Popular Culture: Singing Out from the Stands on 18 May 2021, available online: http://www.routledge.com/9780367433505 and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

Cable, Jonathan ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2585-3419 (2021) 'What's he know about the Premier League?': Football media and the perpetuated archetypes of 'Englishness'. In: Football and Popular Culture: Singing Out from the Stands. Critical Research in Football, 1 . Routledge, pp. 170-185. ISBN 9780367433505

Official URL: https://www.routledge.com/Football-and-Popular-Culture-Singing-Out-from-the-Stands/Millar-Power-Widdop-Parnell-Carr/p/book/9780367433505

EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/9512

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‘What’s he know about the Premier League?’

Football media and the perpetuated archetypes of ‘Englishness’

Jonathan Cable

Introduction

The 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 Premier League seasons saw several high-profile debates about the employment of English versus foreign managers at top-level football clubs. Two such examples include Paul Merson and Phil Thomson’s rant about Hull City appointing the Portuguese manager Marco Silva stating ‘What’s he know about the Premier League? What’s he know?’, or former England manager Sam Allardyce saying that English managers were being treated as ‘second class citizens’ (Nicholson 2017; Tyers 2017). These examples highlight the clear distinction being made between a version of ‘Englishness’ and a perceived threat of foreigners to English football. It represents a crisis in national identity (Porter 2004; Maguire 2011), which has been brought on by the processes of globalisation (Maguire 1999, 2011). This chapter uses Lule’s (2001) arguments around myth and its continued use in journalism. It takes a critical look at how the perpetuated archetype of ‘Englishness’ is portrayed. Furthermore, it examines the narratives present in football media around what makes a ‘proper’ football manager, and how this archetype is consistently reproduced and reinforced in football punditry and football journalism. The key arguments made in this chapter are that language such as this creates very distinct in and out groups in football media, and a skewed portrayal of modern football and managers who encapsulates a very particular type of nostalgic, myth-based nationalism.

This chapter takes a critical look at how the mythical archetype of ‘Englishness’ is represented through the prevalent use of the term ‘proper football man’ (PFM) and what characteristics this phrase comes to exemplify. Myth in this case is ‘not unreality. Myth is not false belief. Myth is not an untrue tale’ (Lule 2001, p. 15). This is an archetype which is continuously repeated and reinforced by both football pundits and in opinionated football journalism. The main idea behind this chapter was prompted by the columns of Alan Tyres (*Daily Telegraph* journalist) and John Nicholson (journalist and author) on the independent football opinion website *Football365* entitled ‘Eye on the Experts’. In one such article from December 2013, ‘Clever and a “Football Man”? Give Him a Job …’, Nicholson discusses English manager archetypes which they dubbed the ‘Proper Football Man’ in relation to Tottenham Hotspur and rumours of former player Tim Sherwood becoming their next manager (2013). They detail, among other facets of the phrase, the very definition of PFM:

> What the hell is a ‘proper football man’? And as opposed to what? Was AVB not a ‘proper football man’? No. In this context, ‘a proper football man’ is code for ‘a thicko that we can understand and not someone who is too clever for us’; that's what it really means. It's a cipher. For ‘breath of fresh air’ read ‘not some weird foreigner who can construct a sentence, unlike thems of us what can’t’. Sherwood is English. English is good. It means you haven’t, in that awkward and distasteful phrase, ‘gone foreign’. (ibid)

What can be interpreted from this definition is that the PFM is English, traditional in worldview and approach, and represents a state of nostalgia for the ‘good ole days’. The conflict created by English vs the rest provides a story with characters, plot, and a theme. The press plays a key role in these arguments because they provide the platform from which Englishness is shaped and which of its preferred national characteristics are amplified.

Literature review

Football exists as a microcosm for wider societal issues, and to unpack the underlying messages found within the press, this section looks at how Britain’s best-selling tabloid, *The Sun* (Tobitt 2018), has treated football over the years. Furthermore, the theories behind this research around myth and identity in relation to sport will be entered into in more detail. Whannel (2002) has argued that sport is a combination of news and entertainment where the athletes/ managers are treated like characters in a soap opera. *The Sun* is very much at the centre of these kinds of portrayals and myths around Englishness in pursuit of an archetypal working-class male. To get a sense of why *The Sun* is like this, you need to go back to the 1980s when there was a series of ‘behind the scenes’ books relating to the paper. One such book, *Sun-Sation* by Grose, talked about how television had driven audience attention to newspapers because the tabloids were the main source for backstage gossip, especially around famous people’s private lives (1989; see also Chippendale and Horrie 1990). Fundamentally, it is a paper which deals in celebrity and self-publicity rather than news and sport as vital to its operations. The underlying nature of its views are exemplified by the paper’s first Sports Editor in 1969, Frank Nicklin, who was referred to as a master of the nostalgia piece; he’s also known to have said that the paper needed ‘four rows of teeth’ (quoted in ibid). In the late 1980s the Sports Editor David Balmforth went further and said that *The Sun* had ‘eight rows of teeth’ (quoted in Domeneghetti

2014). This confrontation and biting stance led Wagg (1986) to talk of 'guilty men' where 'negative pressure' is heaped onto players and managers either directly or tangentially via 'readers say'. In footballing terms, this tends to follow attributions of blame when the England national team exit a World Cup. For example, when England lost to Iceland and exited the World Cup in 2016, *The Sun*'s headline was 'Ice Wallies' and referred to it as England's 'most humiliating defeat ever', laying blame for the defeat with 'Everybody wearing an England shirt' (Ashton 2016). In other words, the 'guilty men'.

This type of coverage originates in the late 1950s early 1960s (ibid, p. 38). This moment in time represented a turning point in how football was covered when the press moved from just reporting on matches and transfer speculation towards a much more personality centred narrative. This change came about because of two specific influences:

i) Outside of sport there was the damaging of national pride brought on by the fall of the British Empire and subsequent fears brought on by the Cold War. On the field in 1953 England were beaten for the first time at Wembley by a side from outside the British Isles. Hungary won, 6–3, and the loss was seen as emblematic of England's fall from grace.
ii) The tabloid press wanted to differentiate themselves from the television coverage that was being served up at the time. (ibid)

Even England's World Cup win on home soil in 1966 did not stop this trend from happening, as Carrington argues the narratives around this triumph are seen through a nostalgic, mythical lens which longs for a perceived purer, simpler time, which is also more white (1998). Furthermore, he argues that sports teams represent the image of national identity because they highlight the positive or negative narratives chosen to discipline said identity (ibid). In addition, the journalist Rory Smith wrote in his book *Mister,* about the people who spread the sport worldwide, that English football stalled for a decade because of the 1966 win because the nation looked inwards rather than following tactical developments on the continent (2016).

Central to the relationship between the press and teams has been the manager. Pre-1966, managers were treated with deference and respect, but post-1966, they became personalities, embodying the ethos of clubs, and celebrities in their own rights (Carter 2007, p. 218). A great example of what the relationship used to be like comes from the day after England won the World Cup in 1966. The journalist Ken Jones approached a victorious England manager Alf Ramsey with a view to conducting an interview, but he famously replied, 'Sorry, it's my day off' and he meant it (quoted in Bowler 1998, p. 228). Newspapers at this point in time were the main source of 'behind the scenes' information for fans about their clubs, players, and managers. The press was central in terms of access to more personalised portrayals and the reproduction of archetypal nationalism. The 'myth of '66' continues to weigh heavily in press narratives around players and the national team which Critcher identified as a more celebrity style of journalism that demonises the banal and disciplines players to fit the mould of a much more traditional, nostalgic style of sports star (1979). For example, here is how the *Daily Mail* described England's captain Harry Kane during the 2018 World Cup: 'How magnanimous, gentlemanly Harry Kane conjures up memories of Bobby Moore rather than his scandal-tainted predecessors as captain' (Jones and Rainey 2018).

How a manager becomes defined by the national press is partially due to the culture outside of football, because the game itself does not exist in perfect isolation (Critcher 1991, p. 82). Furthermore, these representations prioritise personality over sporting prowess and place managers into one of three roles: (1) entertainer; (2) individual personalist; and (3) embodiment of sporting narrative (Critcher 1979, 1991). The third of these traits is of particular importance because it represents so much more than surface-level discussions. Where nation fits into all this is exemplified by *The Guardian* journalist Richard Williams who once said (quoted in Boyle 2006, p. 103), 'A 22-year-old has money and wealth, so there isn't that chance to experience an understanding of their way of life'. It is a famous complaint that players are wrapped in cotton wool, overplayed, and lack passion for the English national team. Taken further, if Critcher's (1979, 1991) topology and the importance of style in football is considered, these are the characteristics footballing heroes have or do not have. There is a press need for players, and by extension managers, to remain in the traditional/located mould, where working-class roots of the game are upheld and there is a core of nostalgic myth in order for readers to identify with them. This narrative is, however, up against the modern reality of the dislocated superstar that represents the majority of contemporary elite footballers.

How a player or manager becomes defined by the national press is partially because of the culture outside of football. To highlight this point, we should again mention player Harry Kane, whose ordinariness was perceived as a virtue, embodied in the phrase 'one of our own'. Sport journalist Jonathan Liew wrote about Kane in 2015 referring to the 'He's one of our own' chant, describing it a lament for lost local heroes and a globalised game changed beyond all recognition (2015). In contrast, a previous England captain, John Terry, was seen to embody nostalgia, for the traditional was found in his style of play and personal background, up against his scandal-ridden and dislocated private life (Ewen 2013). These narratives play out as an exemplifier of what has been highlighted in past research.

The centre of this argument is that the '*news most often tells stories that support and sustain the current state of things*'

(Lule 2001, p. 36, emphasis in original). The 'current state of things' has developed from what Porter (2004) talked about as English people who lived through or were born in the post-World War II era became accustomed to the idea that they belonged to an old country that had seen better days, and a national sense of 'declinism' was setting in. The sporting triumphs of especially the English national team are 'somehow symptomatic of the nation's health' (ibid, p. 35). Furthermore, Black's article on press narratives around the London 2012 Olympics and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee were emblematic of an identity which 'oscillated between nostalgia for an English/ British past – marred by decline – and a present that, while being represented as both confident and progressive, was beset by latent anxieties' (2016, p. 797). Central to this sense of national identity is a view of culture as having an immutable timelessness quality, a defined origin, continuity, and tradition (Maguire 1999). However, when this is placed against the backdrop of the processes of economic globalisation, Maguire uses the term 'Little Englander' to describe the 'strong defensive reaction to globalisation processes, European integration, the pluralisation of national culture and the assertiveness of the "Celtic fringe"' (2011, p. 990).

Football in this instance is playing a contradictory role. On the one hand, the global success of the English Premier League (EPL) is an exemplar of the processes of globalisation; on the other hand, clubs are anchored geographically, and this plays into national identity formation. The emergence of the EPL and the riches brought by the billion-pound broadcasting deals led to the movement of foreign players and managers to the EPL. The sheer wealth generated by broadcasting rights has meant that the business of football has moved far beyond old perceptions of 'English' football. These perceptions are fuelled by myth from two different sources. One is journalistic myth which 'upholds some beliefs but degrades others. It celebrates but also excoriates. It affirms but it also denies' (Lule 2001, p. 119). The other is nationalistic collective memory which 'serves to flatten the complexity, the nuance, the performative contradictions of human history; it presents instead a simplistic and often uni-vocal story' (Bell 2003). These myths are propagated by the football media, such as Tolson's research into *Soccer Saturday* on Sky Sports in the UK where pundits discuss issues and commentate on live games (2016). But expertise and authority of Soccer Saturday comes from the experience of the pundits having played and managed in football (ibid). This turns managers and players into actors on the stage, and in the tabloid press the performances are a pantomime where nuance is lost, and the heroes and villains are obvious and visibly different from the general public (Maguire 1999). In this case it is the foreign which has been othered. Journalists and pundits are acting as storytellers who tell and retell myths.

This section has detailed the general background concepts to the research. The following section will lay out how the data was gathered and analysed.

Methodology

In order to uncover how the PFM label was being used in the press, a Lexis Nexis search of all UK national newspapers was conducted using the exact phrase 'proper football man/men'. This resulted in 258 articles from June 2002 to the end of December 2019, as well as prominent examples from broadcast coverage mention in newspapers as part of this debate. This was done to examine the contexts within which the word was used, the narratives it drew upon, and what its key characteristics and uses were. The football media in this case is acting as a 'validator' of viewpoints by defining 'whose views need to be taken seriously' (Gamson and Meyer 1996, p. 290). Media framing in this chapter takes from Boykoff and Laschever's work on the American Tea Party movement, where frames exist as:

> consistent, coherent bundles of information that journalists provide to imbue real-world events with structure and meaning. Media frames organise issues, pointing both backward at what happened and forward, offering interpretive cues for what it all means.
>
> (2011, p. 346)

In the football media this constitutes those with a significant enough publicity platform to talk on an issue; be they the ex-players/managers who, acting as broadcast pundits, supply 'colour', analysis, professional experience, ghost-written columns, or prominent sport journalists who generate opinion and perspectives around events. This plays into Entman's concept of a 'cascading activation model' where the ability to amplify and solidify frames depends on someone's position and power; 'Some actors have more power than others to push ideas along to the news and then to the public' (2004, p. 9). Furthermore, the highlighting of particular issues, in this case the number of English managers, supplies a media context that is created through the 'selection and salience' of certain issues by the football media versus those which are ignored (Entman 1993, p. 52). This provides a set of frames that contain what Entman calls an 'imprint of power' whereby issues are diagnosed, moral judgements passed, and solutions suggested (ibid, p. 55). The moral judgements and issues in this situation are around football managers and their country of origin. The following list of words represent an overview of how PFM is defined. This is taken from the Lexis Nexis newspaper articles where the key words and characteristics attributed to the phrase were examined:

> Hard (as in tough), passionate, English (but not always – British and Irish also), hardworking, traditionalist, no-nonsense, term of endearment between managers, battler, authentic, genuine, respectful, manager (only very occasionally players), feels deserving of more credit, masculine, anti- data analytics, anti-intellectual, lacking self-awareness, generally media friendly, and contradictory.

In each story the term 'proper football man/men' was isolated, and the words around the term were read and recorded to build up an overview of the context within which the phrase was used. To complement Entman's framing, this chapter utilises Lule's seven key enduring myths of journalism:

1. The victim – helps to define 'good and evil'.
2. The scapegoat – ridicules and degrades the individual while explaining away problems, and acts as a warning to others.
3. The hero – embodies lauded social values.
4. The good mother – Reaffirms the current social order and community values are given voice.
5. The trickster – illustrates the necessity for societal rules.
6. The other world – the exotic 'other'.
7. The flood – the unstoppable that creates a sense of helplessness (2001)

If we take these categories and map them onto the most common frames of PFM, the majority are applicable. The most regularly occurring myths are the PFM as a hero/victim, whereas foreign coaches are framed as scapegoats, tricksters, and other worldly. The following section will unpack the term 'proper football man' from the sample and examine how it has been used in press coverage and what this means for its continuing use.

Findings and analysis

The origin and use of the phrase PFM go back to the early 2000s, when it was used to describe what the English FA needed in a new Chief Executive to move the organisation forward. Henry Winter writing in *The Telegraph*, talked about it as follows:

> Meanwhile, damage to the FA is being done by the day and unless a proper football man is installed as chief executive the lights will continue to dim at Soho Square.
>
> (2003)

Just in this quote it is clear to see the formation of a myth, and the suggestion that those who do not fit are an 'other'. The PFM is the hero coming to save English football; on the other hand, the non-PFM is a scapegoat who will bring about the game's destruction. More on these aspects in a moment. The term really rises to prominence in 2007, with its usage becoming popularised around discussions of the English national team and the connotations of its use has a traditionalist form. This has seemingly been prompted by press debates around the nationality of the England national team's manager, because the England FA's managerial appointments in the 2000s went from Swede Sven Goran Ericsson, to Englishman Steve McLaren who failed to qualifying for the European Championships in Austria and Switzerland in 2008, then came Italian Fabio Cappello before he left the job, and Englishman Roy Hodgson took charge (see Griggs and Gibbons 2014 for more on the manager's nationality, national identity, and the English press). The nationality of the English coach has always been at the centre of debates in the British press.

Take the following from Longmore in the *Sunday Times*, for example, who in discussing Harry Redknapp's candidacy for the England job as being 'no-nonsense', a man who 'believes football is a simple game made unnecessarily complicated' and is as 'tactically astute as any manager in the Premier League' (2007). Here, we are getting into an almost hegemonic, natural, common-sense existence of the PFM as English. You do not need to perform a test to find out if someone is a PFM or not; you just know. To use Steve McLaren again, he was said to be thinking of inviting previous England manager Terry Venables onto his coaching staff for reasons relating to PFM because McLaren 'knows a proper football man when he sees one' (Samuel 2006, p. 76). When this is extrapolated further, there is a clear 'cascading activation' taking place which comes as part of a community of practice, in this case football. In punditry the people used are traditionally drawn from ex-players and managers and therefore they possess common experiences and a common system of beliefs. Equally, there is a sense that pundits know each other as demonstrated by their familiarity and friendliness towards their colleagues (Tolson 2016). This community of practice is then projected onto what Anderson (1983) referred to as an imagined community, in this case football fans who are assumed to share the same belief systems as the pundit. Football journalism exists in this same world where there is shared language, culture, and narrative construction.

But for every in-group, the PFMs, there is an out-group, and it is strictly hierarchical. If you do not have the same

background or shared interests as these pundits, you are dubbed a Non-Football man. For example when the ex-Director General of the BBC, Greg Dyke, was in charge of the English Football League, sport journalist Paul Hayward in the *Daily Telegraph* commented that Dyke had tried 'convincing people he is a proper football man' going on to define PFM as 'that strange brotherhood you know you are a member of only when one of the greats of the game refers to you as such. Non-proper football men are a lowly breed' (2013). This fits neatly into Lule's hero archetype and places those deemed fit to wear the PFM badge as above reproach. The ultimate non-PFM, however, are the foreign managers who are othered and placed firmly into the category of outsiders. This is something which has happened consistently with foreign players, Millward's (2007, p. 618) research on the topic speaks about 'Outsiders, such as foreign players are easy targets for criticism because they are "different"'. One such incident which took place on the Sky Sports programme *Soccer Saturday* in January 2017 featured the pundits Paul Merson and Phil Thompson criticising Hull City's hiring of Portuguese coach Marco Silva who they turn into a scapegoat for all the ills of English football:

> Paul Merson: 'What's he know about the Premier League? What's he know?' Phil Thompson: 'It's totally astonishing that they have plumped for some- one like this. It's baffling. When there are a lot of people out there who know about the Premier League, about what's required to dig in. He's not got a clue' (quoted on *Football365* 2017a)

These types of attitudes, however, exist in a kind of echo chamber of amplification because they are often supported and repeated in the press. Take the following from Martin Samuel in the *Daily Mail*:

> And yes, it is easy to mock observers such as Paul Merson and Phil Thompson, who both expressed surprise when Silva got the job in January. Yet those who questioned the appointment were making a wider point than the suit- ability of one man. It was about the opportunity afforded to British coaches.
>
> (2017)

The targeting of Silva did not stop there. When he later moved from Hull City to Watford following Hull's relegation, Paul Merson again commented that 'No, they [Watford] will get relegated … To have a manager who has enhanced their reputation by being relegated is remarkable' (Redmond 2017). Non-English League accomplishments either do not matter or do not count as much, and this view is surely aided by Sky's 'Best league in the world' mantra. The validity of claims around British coaches not getting chances to manage at the highest level was examined by one of the originators of the PFM term as a negative when Alan Tyers, writing in 2017 in the *Daily Telegraph*, looked at the statistics behind quotes like Merson's.

Tyres charted the nationalities of English Premier League managers between 2007 and 2017 and found that British and Irish managers do get jobs in the top division, but their roles tend to be lower down the league. For instance, over the 10-year period in which Tyers examined, there were 30 relegations featuring 49 full-time managers, constituting of 43 different individuals, including six managers who had been relegated twice (2017). Of these managers, 82% were of British or Irish descent, and the names often featured were David Moyes, Tony Pulis, Mark Hughes, Sam Allardyce, Harry Redknapp, and Roy Hodgson (ibid). Taking the first name on that list David Moyes and Merson's quote about relegation, Moyes was hired to the West Ham United job in November 2017 following a stint at Sunderland where he recorded an 18.6% win ratio and the club were relegated (ibid). Similarly, and without a sense of contradiction, noted PFM Harry Redknapp has talked about English coaches not getting a chance to manage at a higher level because elite clubs 'keep going foreign, foreign, foreign' (quoted in Davies 2015). But in a separate anecdote, he has also spoken how he helped Englishman Frank Lampard (who is also his nephew) get an interview with Ipswich Town, and eventually his first managerial role at Derby County (quoted in Metro Sport Reporter 2020).

Putting this mixture of media and nationalism into context is to quote Billig's classic text *Banal Nationalism* in which he spells out the relevance of sport coverage to the study of national identity construction in the media: 'All the papers, whatever their politics, have a section in which the "ag is waved with regular enthusiasm' (1995, p. 119). He continues:

> As men scan for the results of their favoured team, they read of the deeds of other men doing battle, in the cause of that larger body, the team. And often the team is the nation battling for honour against foreigners. (ibid, p. 124)

This heroic battle is seemingly never won and constitutes a never-ending war of attrition between the opinions, victimhood, and flag waving of the football media and the globalisation of the EPL. These types of comments around who should become the manager of English football teams are not restricted to one specific club. The following quotes, for example, relate to Tottenham Hotspur, Everton, and Leicester City:

i) Former player, pundit and PFM Jamie Redknapp talked of Tim Sherwood's credentials for the Tottenham job in December 2013, saying 'He has played the game at the highest level, understands English football

and he knows the club inside out. I don't want to be xenophobic, but it's not just English players we don't give a chance to – it's English coaches as well. Sherwood won't talk tactics, he'll talk football. He's no bluffer, he's a football man and he's exactly what Spurs need' (quoted in Redknapp 2013).

ii) A similar narrative was shaped around David Unsworth and the Everton job, with former Everton player Phil Neville commenting that 'it riles me when I see him described as not having enough experience. Unsworth has done the hard yards as a coach and has done a fantastic job with the Everton Under-23 side' (Quoted in *Football365* 2017b).

iii) The final example is from when Frenchman Claude Puel was made coach of Leicester City in 2017: former Sky Sports presenter Richard Keys simply tweeted, 'RIP British coaching' (2017).

The impact of this rhetoric has had very real consequences. The language of English football has exacerbated the situation by discipling and defining in/out groups. For instance, Joshua Robinson of the *Wall Street Journal* looked at the pre- and post-match press conferences of the American Bob Bradley when he was the manager of Swansea City to examine his choice of phraseology (2016). Robinson found that Bradley had adopted British phrases over their American counterparts to appear less other-worldly, such as 'clean sheet' over 'shutout', 'dressing room' rather than 'locker room', and 'supporters' as opposed to 'fans' (ibid). Bradley's only slip was to refer to a penalty as a 'PK' – and according to Robinson, there was a backlash on social media – and he never once used the term 'soccer' (ibid). Moreover, it is not just what kind of English a manager uses, it is the basic use of any English which is sometimes under focus. When the Italian Walter Mazzarri was coach at Watford, he chose to use a translator in order to avoid mistakes; however, sport journalist John Cross of the *Daily Mirror* painted Mazzarri as a trickster, tweeting 'Walter Mazzarri is an insult to the Premier League. He has been in England for a year and not bothered to learn English. Really poor' (2017). Similar sentiments were expressed when Spaniard Unai Emery oversaw London club Arsenal. For example, the following passage comes from a *Daily Mail* article about the team's on-field struggles at the time:

> Emery's insistence on conducting his press duties in English is admirable. But the Spaniard struggles with the language, which is having an impact on his work.
> The language barrier has caused players to misinterpret instructions in training and has left them confused.
> Sources claim Emery's grasp of English has improved – but it is still not at a point where players can fully understand him.
>
> (Mokebel 2019)

The flip side to this is the English manager who comes across as a victim, ignored by the perceived bigger jobs because of their nationality. This is very much an example of the 'little Englander' mentality used by Maguire (2011, p. 990). Sean Dyche at Burnley has consistently been at the centre of these types of narratives. During one press conference, Dyche was quoted as saying the following:

> Antonio Conte [Italian] came in at Chelsea and he got commended for bringing a hard, fast, new leadership to Chelsea, which involved doing 800 metre runs, 400m runs and 200m runs.
> Come to my training and see Sean Dyche doing that and you'd say 'dinosaur, a young English dinosaur manager, hasn't got a clue'.
>
> (quoted in Gaughan 2016)

This thread of being overlooked runs alongside a British/English 'is best' mentality, and a lack of self-awareness appears stark when investigated in greater detail. Take Ray Wilkins's comments about the number of British players at Glasgow Rangers in 2017:

> It's Brits, Brits and Brits again for me, you need more British players in your side not foreigners. Foreign players don't understand the ferocity of Scottish football.
> (Quoted in McGarry 2017)

Wilkins himself had been a foreign player while playing in Italy for AC Milan and France for Paris St Germain. Former England manager Glenn Hoddle said something similar about the number of British players at Tottenham, commenting that 'All the other clubs that have been great, they had loads of foreigners, they didn't have enough English people' (quoted on *Football 365* 2017c). When Hoddle was Tottenham manager, he signed 15 players between 2001 and 2003, of whom 9 were neither British nor Irish. Hoddle, like Wilkins, had also been a foreign player when he played for AS Monaco, becoming *Ligue Un*'s Foreign Player of the Year for the 1987–1988 season (ibid). Football media in all these instances is allowing these narratives to be framed by the same people repeatedly. Punditry is the platform for these ideas to flourish. The next example brings together quite a few of these key themes and involves the PFM Sam Allardyce talking on BeIN Sports with the former Sky presenters Richard Keys and Andy Grey:

> I think you are almost deemed as second class because it is your country. … It is a real shame that we are highly educated, highly talented coaches now with nowhere to go. … The Premier League is the foreign league in England now. … When you look across the owners, the managers and the coaches (and) the players, that is exactly what it is now.
>
> (quoted on *ITV News* 2017)

This quote mostly plays on the victim myth, overlooked despite being talented, but Allardyce also scapegoats the level of non-British people at all levels of the EPL. The myths in this statement attempt to harken back to a perceived, yet unspecified, simpler age which is just nostalgically better somehow, and less foreign. Finally, the place of PFMs in football media was amplified over the summer of 2020 when three of the four presenters on *Soccer Saturday* were sacked (PA Media 2020). The event became unedifying on Twitter following the announcement of the sackings with racist abuse and insinuation being levelled at several black pundits, including Micah Richards and Alex Scott, who had nothing to do with the decision but were somehow seen as part of the issue (de Menezes 2020). The way it was handled and the reaction to it became a demonstration of what the programme had come to represent, a mythical white male enclave in a multiracial sport.

Conclusion

The myth of the PFM's continued existence is because it is repeated regularly and illustrates the sense of loss and decline highlighted by Porter (2004). The findings demonstrate that the PFMs managed to create a dominant frame around English nationality and English identity. This myth and overriding narrative are difficult to challenge because of the relative lack of foreign pundits in broadcast media, with the *Soccer Saturday* incident serving as a perfect example of what happens if a broadcaster tries to make a change. Additionally, there is a lack of diversity amongst sports journalists in the written press where PFMs have been previously been employed as columnists. Essentially, myths and assumptions are pushed by those with the loudest voices, and this is aided by the storytelling of the national press. They are representative of Lule's mythmaking where, rather than societal norms, it is English football's perceived characteristics which are defined, defended, and disciplined by those heroic victims, the PFMs. Although these myths appear hegemonic, there is critique of these nationalistic constructs from outlets like the *Guardian* and *Football365*, but they do not have the same kind of platform to redefine the debate. That said, John Nicholson commented in September 2019 that football was changing and that the PFMs were finding it harder and harder to gain employment in football management (2019). The victimhood has dissipated somewhat when the 2019–2020 season saw English managers at Chelsea (Frank Lampard) and Watford (Nigel Pearson), or be promoted with their teams such as Aston Villa (Dean Smith) and Sheffield United (Chris Wilder). A couple of the old guard are still in work during the 2019–2020 season with David Moyes at West Ham United, Roy Hodgson at Crystal Palace, and Steve Bruce at Newcastle United. Nicholson centres his 2019 article on Sam Allardyce and the impact of PFMs' protestations in the football media. He quotes unnamed footballing officials saying that Allardyce's 'small-islander mentality and full of entitlement and bragging' has put off clubs employing English managers (ibid). In other words, the high profile of PFMs for a time resulted in fewer English managers being hired, not more. These attitudes are running against the tide of football's globalisation. Football is a global sport, and Allardyce's little Englanders, like opinions of English heroism and victimisation, are being seen for what they are: myths.

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