



SIR WALTER WINTERBOTTOM

Words: Graham Morse

AT the age of only 34, Walter Winterbottom was appointed as England's first team manager, having never managed any football team before. It might have seemed an unlikely appointment by FA secretary Stanley Rous, but it turned out to be an inspired decision.

Winterbottom was a pioneer of coaching and an outstanding teacher. For 16 years he worked tirelessly to overcome resistance to coaching and drag English football into the modern era, encouraging players, clubs and administrators to change the way they thought. "Nobody believed in coaches at first," he said. "I wanted to change the whole attitude to coaching in this country."

He remains the only England manager to qualify for four World Cups, taking England to the finals in Brazil (1950), Switzerland (1954), Sweden (1958) and Chile (1962). However it was his contribution to coaching that is his lasting legacy to English football.

Winterbottom's combination of the scholarly and the practical owed much to his background as a teacher, a lecturer in physical education and a wing commander responsible for physical education in the RAF. He played 23 consecutive first team games for Manchester United in the 1936/37 season before a spinal disease cut short a playing career of great promise.

Winterbottom was the founder of the FA national coaching scheme and persuaded his international players to qualify as coaches at his summer courses at Lilleshall. Managers such as Ron Greenwood, Bill Nicholson, Jimmy Hill, Bobby Robson and Don Howe became known as his disciples;

he guided their careers and was influential in placing them in clubs, where they changed attitudes to coaching.

He inspired a generation of coaches and they, in turn, have continued to spread his philosophy. For example, Bobby Robson said of Winterbottom in 2002, "There is no doubt that I owe to him my entire international career, both as a player and a manager." Then, as recently as March, 2013, Andre Villas Boas wrote, "At 17, I met Sir Bobby Robson and my life changed... he inspired me."

Winterbottom brought about radical change within the national team set up, gradually having his own way with the selection committee and chipping away against widespread scepticism about coaching. He encouraged players to analyse the game more deeply, and changed the slapdash, unrealistic and haphazard habits of many in terms of fitness, training, diet and match preparation.

There were humiliating setbacks: losing 1-0 to the US in the 1950 World Cup and 6-3 against Hungary in 1953. But he turned these setbacks to his advantage, warning that England were no longer the best in the world and that in order to compete at the highest level England had to be more professional in its preparations. He introduced B and Under-23 teams and more squad training sessions. The team formation was changed to 4-2-4 and the foundations were laid for World Cup success under Alf Ramsey in 1966.

His contribution to the development of English football is immeasurable. As Sir Bobby Charlton wrote in 1967, "There cannot be many people in the game who see the theory, practice and politics of football as clearly as Walter does."



The complete story

Until now, the story of Walter Winterbottom has gone untold. A new book by Graham Morse, **Sir Walter Winterbottom: The Father of Modern English Football**, has been published by John Blake to mark the manager's 100th anniversary. Visit www.sirwalterwinterbottom.com for more details.