

THE PRESIDENT OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE:

A TALK WITH MR. J. J. BENTLEY.

BY THORPE ARNOLD.

IN what may be called the politics of football, Mr. J. J. Bentley is one of the most prominent figures of to-day. He is president of the Football League, a member of the Council of the Football Association, and one of the Committee for the selection of players for the International matches. He has sometimes been called "The football M.P. for the North," and it may frankly be admitted that on the Council of the Football Association he has generally played the part of the uncompromising champion of the interests of professionalism and the league system. But, for good or evil, professionalism and leagues are now established facts, and all footballers admit that in Mr. Bentley these organisations have an absolutely fair-minded, if militant advocate.

For Mr. Bentley's knowledge of the game and players is unrivalled. Not only was he in his younger days a player of the front rank, but his position as editor of the *Athletic News* for many years, in addition to his official connection with the Football Association and the League, have given him an unequalled opportunity for acquiring a personal and practical knowledge of everything that appertains unto football. Mr. P. F. Warner is popularly supposed to be able to tell you off-hand the individual scores in any cricket match played in the last fifty years, but Mr. Bentley's knowledge of football is even more comprehensive. His acquaintance with dates, statistics, and the names and performances of players, is not

the result of a severe course of study of football annuals, but is the outcome of actual experience. He has seen every important match for the last twenty years, and has been on more or less familiar terms with every player of note during the same period.

Mr. Bentley was paying a visit to London, to watch the comparative merits of German and English amateurs at Tottenham, when I saw him for the purpose of this interview. "I played my first football match at Turton," he told me, "in 1873, as a boy of thirteen. Turton is a tiny little village outside Bolton, and many people in the South of England have probably never heard of it, but its record for producing great footballers is wonderful. Turton was, in fact, to the football world what Lascelles Hall was to the cricket world. Just as that little Yorkshire village used at one time to provide Yorkshire with



Photo by]

MR. J. J. BENTLEY.

[Crippin & Co.

the best of its cricketers, so Turton was the factory, so to speak, of footballers for Lancashire and a good many other places besides. To mention only a couple of names, Sagar and Leeming, who helped Bury to win the English Cup in 1900, are both natives of Turton. However, in the early 'seventies importing players was unknown, and Turton was able to keep its own men, and a very fine eleven it was able to put into the field. The little village has the further distinction of having introduced the Association game into Lancashire. The first captain of the eleven was J. C. Kay, the well-known old Harrovian and lawn tennis

W. McGregor. J. J. Bentley. J. C. Clegg
R. C. Gosling. J. Holt. (Referee). G. Kinsey. R. Holmes. J. Goodall.



W. T. Bassett. J. Reynolds. G. H. Cotterill (capt.). L. H. Gay. A. H. Harrison.
F. Spikesley. E. Chadwick.

ENGLAND v. SCOTLAND, 1893.

Photo by Byrne & Co., Richmond.

player, and for the first two years of its existence football at Turton was played under the Harrow rules, with the ball the shape of a cheese. Under the captaincy, however, of Mr. W. Forrest the Harrow game was dropped and the rules of the London Association were followed. Professionalism was, of course, unheard of in those days, but so keen were the villagers and players alike about the game that the team submitted without a murmur to a course of discipline which would rather shock many amateurs of to-day. At first we were all gilt-edged amateurs and paid every farthing of our travelling expenses out of our own pockets; but by and by the 'cloven hoof of professionalism' made its appearance, and we were allowed the magnificent sum of a shilling a match for expenses. Still, I think we were entitled to call ourselves amateurs, as the railway fare to Nottingham, say, and putting up for the night at some hotel, did not leave us any appreciable change out of a shilling."

Mr. Bentley succeeded Mr. Forrest as captain of Turton, and it might here be

mentioned that the Turton club gave Bolton Wanderers, with whom Mr. Bentley was subsequently connected for so long, their first lesson in Association football. But Turton did more than initiate rising clubs into the mysteries of the game. It defeated most of the big clubs for miles round, and distinguished itself greatly in the competition for the English Cup. Turton only fell from its high estate when the habit of importing players came into vogue. If towns were nowadays compelled to play native born players only, it is possible that the little village outside Bolton, with its three hundred inhabitants, would stand somewhere near the head of the League.

"Not many people," continued Mr. Bentley, "I fancy, connect the British Association with football; yet it is a fact that an organisation of that name once played a very important part in the history of the game. It came about this way. Professionalism was not legalised till 1885; but for many years before that it was an open secret that the players in nearly all the big clubs were receiving payment. The authorities were

well aware of the fact, but took no active steps till in 1884 they disqualified Great Lever and Burnley for competing for the English Cup, on the grounds that most of the players of both these clubs were really professionals. As a matter of fact, veiled professionalism was rampant in every Lancashire club at the time; but Lancashire made a great show of virtuous indignation and withdrew from the Football Association, and formed a combination of all the leading clubs in the county, under the title of the British Association. The main object was to demand from the Football Association that professionalism should be legalised. Two Lancashire clubs, however—Blackburn and Darwen—refused to join the new organisation. Inasmuch as Darwen not only paid its players, but was actually the first English club to import a Scotsman, one James Love by name, its action was not altogether popular, but it really didn't matter very much, as the British Association only lasted for a single year."

It was the British Association which really brought to a head the question of professionalism. Previous to this, commissions had been appointed by the Football Association, to make inquiries and examine the account books of the suspected clubs. But complete evidence was most difficult to find, and when the books were promptly produced by the secretaries, they accounted for every penny in the most complete manner. Yet it was common knowledge that many, if not all, of the players belonging to these clubs were paid. The popular tale is that the men's wages were placed in their ordinary boots, where they found them when they dressed after the match; but no such pains to ensure secrecy were taken. They were paid quite openly out of the gate money, the net sum remaining after those disbursements being entered in the books kept for inspection as the gross amounts. Others were found situations, or were established in tobacco and hosiery shops. The officials of the Lancashire clubs simply laughed at the commissions.

G. S. Sherrington
(Vice-President).

J. J. Bentley.

C. J. Hughes.



T. Robertson Athersmith. Forman. W. J. Oakley. Robinson. P. A. Timbs (Linesman).
(Referee). Bloomer. Williams. G. O. Smith. C. Wreford Brown Needham. Wheldon. Spikesley.
(Captain).

THE WINNING ENGLISH TEAM (3 Goals to 1) IN THE INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL MATCH, 1898.

Photo by Geo. Bell & Co.

This state of things, of course, could not continue, and in 1885 a meeting of the Football Association was held in London, to consider the whole question of professionalism. "Roughly speaking," said Mr. Bentley, "all the clubs in the North of England were determined to have professionalism legalised, while the clubs in the South and the Midlands were no less strongly opposed to it. Major Marindin was in the chair, and Mr. C. W. Alcock, the secretary at the Oval—although as an old Harrovian all his football associations were in

epoch in the history of Association football, lasted less than ten minutes."

The Football League was formed in 1888, and its first president was Mr. McGregor, who held that office until 1893, when he was succeeded by Mr. Bentley, who four years previously had been elected a member of the Council of the Football Association. Since to many well-meaning people even nowadays professionalism in football is anathema, Mr. Bentley's views on the subject may be instructive. "Pure amateurism in every sport," he said to me, "I hold to be the

J. J. Bentley
(Secretary).

D. Weir.

J. Hutchinson.

J. Trainer.

J. Parkinson (1).

R. Roberts.

J. Parkinson (2).

J. Parkinson (3)

(Umpire).



Photo by]

J. K. Davenport.

J. Brogan.

W. Steel.

W. G. Struthers.

J. Hewitson.

R. Hough.

[Weatherley Bros.

THE BOLTON WANDERERS, 1886.

With the three Cups they won that year—viz., the Bolton and District Charity Cup, the Derbyshire Charity Cup, and the Lancashire Challenge Cup.

favour of amateurism—recognised that professionalism was inevitable and urged that it should be legalised. In the end, however, one hundred and thirteen voted for professionalism and one hundred and eight against it; but as the requisite two-thirds majority had not been obtained, the law remained as it was. Six months afterwards another meeting of the Football Association was held at Anderton's Hotel, at which the necessary number voted in favour of professionalism, which thus became law. It is a somewhat remarkable fact that this meeting, which undoubtedly was a most important

higher state; but, unfortunately, in football it is impossible. Amateurism can only exist in sports which are followed exclusively by the wealthier classes, such as hunting and shooting, for example, where those who indulge in them pay all their expenses out of their own pocket. But this is impossible in any popular sport like cricket and football, which are the games of rich and poor alike. I have always been an advocate for professionalism in football, because I am convinced that open professionalism is better than bogus amateurism. And in clubs whose members are drawn mainly from the

working classes, only one or other of these alternatives is possible."

We were on the subject of football in the South of England, and I asked Mr. Bentley if he thought the day would ever come when the South could really hold its own against the North in Association football. Of course, I had not forgotten that Tottenham Hotspurs won the Cup last year, but the most enthusiastic Southerner cannot claim that numerically Southern clubs are as strong as those in the North. "I think it quite possible," said Mr. Bentley, "that at some not very distant date a National League will be formed which will embrace the best clubs in the country, in the North as well as in the South, and that territorial distinctions, so to speak, will vanish. What I mean is that, although clubs will be just as anxious to beat each other then as now, there will be no more particular distinction between the North and the South than there is at present between the North and the Midlands. What I should like to see established would be a London club, with its headquarters at the Oval or the Crystal Palace. The club I have in my mind would be composed of amateurs as well as professionals. There is no reason why such a club should not be quite as strong as any club now in existence, and, being in a more central position than Tottenham, it would give an enormous impetus to London football."



Photo by] [Beatt'e.
THE LATE FRED DEWHURST.
Secretary of Preston North End and Member of Corinthians.
v. Scotland, 1887.
v. Wales, 1886-7-8-9.
v. Ireland, 1886-7-8.

Mr. Bentley, being a practical man, is not much given to answering questions on an imaginary subject, but I managed to draw from him an answer as to what he considered the best possible team that England could put in the field, provided that every International player for the last twenty years were still available and had kept his youth. "The best International team I ever saw," said Mr. Bentley, "was that captained by A. P. T. Dunn in 1892, which beat Scotland four

R. Baugh. W. Malpas. H. Allen. W. C. Rose. G. Kinsey. G. Swift.



R. Topham. D. Wykes. J. H. Butcher. H. Wood. A. Griffin.

WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS, WINNERS OF ENGLISH CUP, 1893.
Photo by T. M. Laws.

goals to one. No one before the match was played had any idea that England could avoid defeat, much less achieve such an overwhelming victory; but all the eleven played up to the top of their form, and, I imagine, somewhat astonished our good friends in Scotland. But about your imaginary team. Beginning with the goal-keeper, I should choose either W. R. Moon or Sutcliffe; but if Moon were selected, the two Walters should be chosen as backs, as the strong point of their play was the combination and understanding that existed between the three. Needham, Holt, and George Howarth I consider the best half-backs England ever turned out, and for forwards I do not know that one could improve on Bassett, Bloomer, John Goodall, Cobbold, and Spikesley."

As all followers of football are aware, Mr. Bentley, although he was in his younger days an excellent player, never received his International cap. Yet, in a photograph which most footballers have seen, he appears in the group of International players who represented England against Scotland in 1892. How this came about is best explained by Mr. Bentley himself. "As one of the selection committee," he said, "I travelled with the English team to Glasgow in 1892. In those days, I am afraid, relations between professional and amateur footballers were not quite so amicable as they are at present, and when the inevitable photographer came along with his camera it was found that the team was one man short, the only amateur in the eleven having suddenly absented himself. I don't know whether this was done intentionally or accidentally, but anyhow, the fact remained that the team was one man short, and as it was felt that it would never do for an

International ten to be photographed, it was suggested that I should fill the vacant space. And this is how I came to appear in the English International eleven in 1892."

No account of Mr. Bentley would be complete without some allusion to his connection with Bolton Wanderers. He became secretary of that club in 1885, and it may be said without exaggeration that the prosperity and success of Bolton Wanderers was co-extensive with his tenure of the secretaryship. In 1887 he resigned his post, and within twelve months the club was struggling with defeats and financial difficulties. He then resumed the reins of office, and almost immediately Bolton Wanderers found themselves again prosperous and victorious.

But, apart altogether from his success in the politics of football, Mr. Bentley has made a wide name for himself in the journalistic world. His editorship of the *Athletic News* revolutionised what at one time used to be somewhat contemptuously referred to as "sporting journalism." During his connection with it the circulation of that paper was trebled, and he succeeded in showing that reports of cricket and football matches can, without flippancy or vulgarity, be made most interesting reading.

T. C. Slaney (Referee). G. Howarth. H. Arthur. S. Ormerod
J. M. Lofthouse. F. Suter. J. Almond. (Committee).



W. G. Struthers. R. H. Howarth. F. Dewhurst. G. Drummond.
J. K. Davenport. J. Forrest. W. Steel.

LANCASHIRE TEAM v. NORTH WALES.

Photograph by R. P. Gregson, Blackburn.