

Magic moments

Geoff is a man of many parts. Owen Mather, with contributions from players past and present, gathers up the threads that make him 'The Gaffer'

1. Pragmatic Gaffer In 2000/01, when 1-0 up against eventual champions South Indies, left-winger Terry and new recruit Filippo came to blows over a throw-in. We lost 3-1 and the Gaffer said farewell to Terry who, "in the best traditions of British Trotskyism, helped to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory by turning on his own team-mate when comfortably on top". Terry was never seen again. Fil stayed and became a PFFC lynch-pin.

2. Organisational Gaffer On our second ever tour, to Rome in December 2000, Joe praised Gaffer for gathering up a "motley collection of British, thirty-something, Loaded-generation males" whose tickets were booked and kit packed and who arrived in timely fashion at Heathrow. Gaffer forbade the full English breakfast in Terminal 2: pasta and grilled fish only was the strict instruction.

3. Dug-out Gaffer On that same tour, PFFC took to the pitch against the Italian NUJ at the national football team's training ground. Geoff described the facilities as "paradise": a pitch like a carpet, proper linesmen, fully functioning showers with hot water, physios on hand and a drinks lounge. Above all they had a professional looking dug-out. Gaffer made himself at home.

4. Optimistic Gaffer The Gaffer's infinite well of optimism was epitomised during our tour to Prague when we were being roundly thrashed. With ten minutes remaining, Ian Coyne prodded home a consolation goal from close range. From the touchline Geoff screamed: "Come on lads – this is the turning point!" The game ended in a 7-1 defeat.

5. Night vision Gaffer Whilst England posted an era-defining 5-1 victory over Germany in Munich on 1 September 2001, PFFC were in southern France battling AFC Caylus. The game ended 0-0 in the gloom of floodlight failure. Gaffer came on as a late substitute. Squinting in near total darkness, he was heard to exclaim: "Where's the ball?"

6. Tactical Gaffer On the way to a first championship title in 2001/02, Gaffer experimented with three at the back in a pivotal game against rivals Inter Aztec. Pandemonium set in and we were 3-0 down inside twenty minutes. Joe later noted that, "even Gaffers

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Editorial

This special edition of the PFFC newsletter is a present for Geoff to celebrate his 50th birthday. In it we honour what he has done for this club.

The articles, written by his friends, create a profile of the man through the things he is passionate about: philosophy, politics, Italy, food, QPR. But this is about more than just Geoff. The themes that emerge are fundamental to the club's identity: intellectual and cultural curiosity; political engagement; enjoyment of life's simple pleasures.

Sure, we can joke about the enigma of our Marxist 'two-gaffs Gaffer'. These jokes are, however, affectionate, because Geoff's values are decent values. His efforts for this club over the years have enriched the lives of many people. *Grazie Gaffer!*

Hegemony, collectivism and the flat back four

Geoff explores the philosophical basis of good football management, in excerpts taken from a 2005 interview with Filippo Ricci

Before the 1990s, football in England was considered vulgar. But then a cultural revolution took place which allowed intellectuals to get close to football. At the same time, a cultural revolution also took place within the sport itself, with the arrival of foreign players and managers. They brought and imposed a different approach to football in this country, and this revolution brought about the re-birth of football.

The models for English football were old, petty, outdated. Look at the job done by Arsene Wenger at Arsenal. He took 'boring Arsenal' and returned them to winning ways, while playing spectacular football. Wenger progressively added a Frenchness to the team, while asking his French players to adapt to the indigenous style.

My philosophical models for football management come from a tradition which runs through Marx, Gramsci, soviet collectivism, with the existentialism of Sartre and Camus. Wenger followed, though probably without knowing it, the Gramscian and Marxist model. His was a manifesto of concreteness as opposed to abstraction: he studied the local reality, made it his, and with this insight into the local texture started his revolution.

Gramsci's hegemony represents an ideal base for any manager. Gramsci sets hegemony against domination: the power of persuasion over brute strength. The concept of hegemony applied to management means you lead in order to change the culture, the old ideas, the predefined values of a society.

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Marx praised 'concreteness'. He criticised the Hegelian dialectic because it was based on 'the head' – on ideas – and not on 'the feet', which represent material and economic conditions. It's a metaphor that anticipates football. Philosophical abstraction offers nothing for football. You need concreteness. You need to stick to a daily reality, to study your resources and those of your opponent. For example, I like to have an Italian-style number 10 in my team. It gives the option of playing a 4-3-1-2 system, a system that at our lowly level is enough to surprise some opponents. At the same time, the system requires my players, with their British cultural inheritance, to change their approach, to widen their limited tactical horizons, to adapt to a new scheme. And this is where hegemony comes into it. A manager must not overdo things. Abstraction plays nasty tricks. I once tried three in defence against our major rivals. After 20 minutes we were 3-0 down. This is where Gramsci and Marx's ideas on everyday experience come into play: the ability to absorb the daily reality, to grasp the local culture and the social texture, so that you can make radical changes. I reverted to a back four, we won 6-4 and claimed the title. In football, too, you can't have a revolution based on abstraction.

Collectivism is the ability to assign to individuals a precise role wherein they can best express their uniqueness, whilst always bearing in mind that the main aim is what benefits the group. The first great collectivist managers in England were Bill Shankly at Liverpool and Brian Clough at Nottingham Forest. They understood the importance of protecting the group, especially its youngest members. Philosophy must be applied to the social model and it must be rooted in the historical experience of a society. The difficulties, for a manager as for a philosopher, lie precisely in building a leadership, an hegemony, that can adapt itself to the reality, that can win over the masses.

As for the individual, **Camus** and **Sartre** wanted them to be free to express themselves, to enjoy more freedom, not simply to submit to the long march of history. Applied to football, this concept describes the characteristics of the postmodernist player, capable of distancing himself from the sport's deadened culture, able to exploit social fragmentation, capable of forging his own space so that he can best express himself in a free way. Such a player has no particular loyalty or affection to shirts and cultures, but can adapt himself without difficulty, free from concepts such as residency, nationality and loyalty. I'd put Maradona and Cantona in this category. Also someone who retired early, like Platini, who put himself above football, money, career.

A team, like a model of society, must allow intellectuals and the proletariat to live together in balance. The basic work rate must be enriched by the ideas and creativity of the thinkers. A manager has to bring together these two entities, to act as intermediary, without creating hierarchies. Without the fullback, the number 10 can achieve nothing. Success comes from uniting the players' technique, ability and physical strength with the manager's ideas and strategies. He must be capable of spotting that moment when he has to take action. The moment when, as Marx would have it, theory must be applied to practice. Philosophy can help compensate for a deficit in raw skill. It's this assumption that gives birth to those great victories that small teams have enjoyed in the FA Cup. The gaffer must provide his men with the intellectual means to help them overcome their technical limits: discipline, clear targets, observing and managing the whole 90 minutes, the use and exploitation of your own resources. If skill, ability and physical strength are the first requirement of a team, philosophy is the second. And learning to impose your way of thinking can help you overcome more prepared opponents. The gaffer must be able to gain the complicity of his players, just as an intellectual must win the trust of the proletariat to bring about a revolution. There, we're back to the concept of hegemony once more: the ability to win the hearts and minds of your own players.

This interview can be read in unabridged form at philosophyfootballfc.org.uk

Our Gaffer

by Rob 'the Cat' Adams

Our Gaffer Geoff, by God he's no dumbo
As he wanders the line dressed as Columbo.
Intensely grasping his hands like some Uriah Heep,
He may be humble but he doesn't grumble,
His football genius lies deep.
Astute, perceptive, focused and clear,
The philosophy ethos this man holds dear.
We may be individuals but we play as a team,
The passing be fluid like an on-running stream.
All for one and one for all,
As we enter the fray and caress that ball.
At times we cry "get back, get back",
He urges the midfield as the defence is under attack.
The whistle brings a smile and a philosophical musing
But our Gaffer Geoff still prefers winning to losing.

If

by 'Cornish' Al Johns (with acknowledgements to Rudyard Kipling)

If you can keep your head
When all about you men are losing theirs
And blaming it on you,
If you can ensure the team's 9.30 arrival
By concealing the kick-off time of 11.32,
If you can wait but not be tired of waiting
For the hair-drying, gown-wearing Italian fuffers,
If you can reconcile your communist ideals
With a private suite at the Hotel des Gaffers,
If you can dream but not make dreams your master,
If you can think and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with triumph and disaster,
And treat those two imposters just the same,
If you can stand on Hackney's historic marshes
And encourage the team through heat and fatigue
Whilst dismissing any suggestion
That life was better in the Grafton Millennium League,
If you can hold up the fine example
Of a striker in his forty-ninth year
And still have a fatherly word
For those who spurn bitter lemon for another wafer-thin
beer,
If you can give your all for the team
But still find time to teach of unions, strikes and pickets,
If you can embrace even the Cornish
And bear with patience another request for those
Jamiroquai tickets,
If you can enjoy the opera in Rome
And insist in Prague on a Czech dumpling dinner,
If you can laugh at Miroslav's jokes
And endure the umpteenth anecdote about Dennis Skinner,
If you can deal with the tantrums of players
The outbursts, the disappointments, the sulks
Whilst retaining a striking resemblance
To the impassive, mac-wearing Peter Falk,
If you can listen to the words of Shakespeare
Spoken by the Chairman to raise a Parisot belief
Yet still enjoy the faltering prose
That slipped from the pen of Eagle Chief,
If you can inspire this team to their limit
But keeping the friendship, the philosophy, the fun,
Yours is the Camden Sunday League and everything that's
in it
And which is more, you'll be a Gaffer, my son.

Geoff, Gramsci and glory

Stefan Howald describes the political values that underpin Geoff's approach to football, food and culture

I first met Geoff around the time of the 1992 UK general election. Some weeks earlier I had attended for the first time a meeting organised by Signs of the Times, an outfit founded by non-orthodox supporters of the Communist Party's monthly magazine, *Marxism Today*. After the infamous Sheffield rally on 9 April 1992, Labour and Neil Kinnock snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. The mood in left-wing circles was one of despair. The hegemony of the Conservatives seemed impregnable and Labour seemed incapable of winning another election. There were thoughts of abandoning Labour for good and joining the Lib Dems as the legitimate party of opposition.

Geoff's vocation as a true Gramscian came in handy: no storming of the winter palace, but renewed and obstinate fighting in the trenches of culture and civic organisations and the state. From his study of the history of the Communist Party, he knew about the importance of cultural organisations of the Left, and this blended in with Gramsci's notion of civil society.

Signs of the Times was trend-setting: a fabulous conference, in 1994, about Michel Foucault; other conferences about post-modern times, city states, critical masses and critical politics; keynote lectures by Noam Chomsky, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy. Geoff was a stalwart in these endeavours and an eloquent speaker and efficient convener.

In 1994, *Philosophy Football* was founded. Although I can't say I was one of the founders, I can proudly say I was there when Philosophy Football FC started playing at the beginning of 1995. Philosophical football was a marriage made in heaven: playing against teams which were similarly politically involved and playing in a new political spirit.

This spirit has two parts. Off the field, there were events at the South Bank Centre, a tournament against racism in Camden, overseas tours undertaken in a spirit of international solidarity and lots of media activity. On the field it was and is a somewhat different affair. What is a left-wing style of play? Okay, it may or must involve and favour collectivism over individualism. But how to achieve that with a motley crew of players, sometimes more eager than talented? In the wilderness years up to 2000, we needed to maintain not only a philosophical but a decidedly stoical mindset in the face of yet another heavy defeat. Another expression of an alternative spirit might be playing without referees. It is a difficult concept, which hasn't been tested to the full by PFFC.

It started with football and culture and lifestyle, but politics has always played a part. Geoff was ever interested in the 'search of the intellectual left', as the title of one of his articles puts it. He dissected the corrupting influence of professionalisation and managerialism in universities and education. He also wrote a book to explain the ongoing success of a crook, liar, racist, serial adulterer and overall cad in Italian politics. Geoff achieved this seemingly impossible task by analysing the attractions of civil society's bulwarks: television and titillation, football and food.

Not any food, naturally, but Slow Food. Geoff has become an expert, a chronicler and a propagandist for this movement which is a protest against globalised brands, the international chain of food production and the monopoly of big retailers, and which prides itself on being local, responsible, ecological – and quite tasty.

But I think PF is and will always be Geoff's main love. With age I have become sceptical about the attempt to reclaim football for the Left, or at least for a left-wing cause. Sometimes it seems the desperate reversal of the adulation of football in our

society. In Switzerland it is our turn to face hooliganism. Some younger, left-leaning colleagues try to explain that pyrotechnics in the stadium and the rituals of defending one's honour and the flags of a gang are an integral part of a subversive culture. I accept that repression is not the right thing to do and we shouldn't demonise such youth cultures, but I doubt these rituals of male bonding have a left-leaning meaning. Football can't, on its own, rectify or heal the failures and fault-lines of society. It is only a game. However, I admire Geoff's unwavering enthusiasm in his attempts to keep the flame burning. Geoff's glory lies with Gramsci: pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will.

A man between the lines

Lele Capurso gives a personal account of Geoff's passion for Italy, QPR and the common good

I first met Geoff in the Spring of 2003 in London. A couple of incredible coincidences linked me, an AC Milan-supporting, Roman gastroenterologist, interested in British culture, with a QPR-supporting Welsh professor, interested in Italian politics, who was writing a book about AC Milan's owner, Silvio Berlusconi.

The first coincidence involved football and pubs. On a cold January night in 2003, I was having a drink with an Italian friend in one of the worst pubs in west London, The Pavilion on Wood Lane. Hundreds of people wearing football shirts were walking towards White City tube. I had no idea there was a stadium nearby, but we followed them, bought our tickets and watched QPR beat Barnsley 1-0. The match was terrible, but I enjoyed the atmosphere and went to Loftus Road a few more times that year.

The second coincidence involved football and friendship: in one word, Filippo. I met him through mutual friends and on Sunday 27 April 2003 he took me to play my first game for PFFC.

So I became passionate about QPR and PFFC. It must have been a surprise to Geoff that I should want to talk about Kevin Gallen while he wanted my views on Romano Prodi.

Later, our standard Saturday programme included a lunch before the QPR match (I have to thank Geoff for introducing me to the Anglesea Arms, a far nicer pub than the Pavilion), watching the match itself with his season-ticket-holding friends and a final 'cheese and wine' session at a wine bar at Shepherd's Bush, chatting about politics, football and what PFFC stands for.

I learned a lot from Geoff, but Geoff is a man with an inquiring mind. He wanted to hear my thoughts about the drama (and comedy) that is Italian politics, about football tactics and about my views on PFFC, on and off the pitch.

I understood that Geoff was attracted by the Italian way of life, including our approach to food and wine, and football. He wanted PFFC to play passing football, without long balls; not an English-style 4-4-2, but 4-3-1-2, with a man between the lines; Carlo Ancelotti, not Ian Holloway; Andrea Pirlo, not Mark Bircham.

Geoff cares about quality, not merely results. He cares about good reasons and not popularity. He cares about the taste and not the amount of food he consumes: not burgers but cheeses; not Tony Blair but Fausto Bertinotti; not London Pride but Barolo.

My impressions of him were confirmed when I read his books. Geoff is an honest researcher and intellectual. His attempts to make PFFC something different from any other football team, in an era in which football has lost most of its social and romantic meanings, is the best 'political' move I have seen in the past twenty years.

Geoff is the man between the lines, the 'number 10'. He is happier to provide the assist than score the goal. He is ready to leave the glory to his teammates, as long as we are clear that we are chasing a common goal. To quote Bill Shankly, the socialism Geoff believes in is everyone working for each other, everyone having a share of the rewards. It's the way he sees football, the way he sees life.

Intelligent design ... Makana FA

Some of PFFC's earliest players were exiled ANC members. **Hugh Tisdale** tells the story of a shirt created in that spirit of political engagement

As well as putting unusual and stimulating quotations from footballers and thinkers onto T-shirts, *Philosophy Football* sometimes uses wordless, slogan-free designs, many of which have proved very successful in promoting causes and issues at the core of the whole PF initiative.



For the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, we wished to highlight the use of football by the prisoners of Robben Island as a weapon of defiance and self-expression in the face of apartheid repression. The Makana FA was a prisoner-organised football body, permitted by the authorities only after ten years of demands from the prison population, and affiliated to FIFA many years later.

The organisation was far too rudimentary to have its own strip, but scratchy black-and-white photos show one of the prison teams wearing shirts with contrasting sleeves and sides, which we used as the basis for our Makana FA shirt. A black body with white sides and sleeves seemed appropriate to symbolise the issue, and the colours of the ANC and the PAC were added to provide interest and context. Luckily for me as designer, these two sometimes conflicting organisations both used black, yellow, green and white, so inclusivity did not hinder symmetry!

Table manners

Geoff is never happier than when seated round a table with good friends, good conversation, good wine and good food. As long as you take it slowly. **Ally Clow** explains

When I joined PFFC, I quickly realised Geoff had a vision for the team: if post-match drinks were to be consumed, a long meal should accompany them. He wanted PFFC to be apart from binge-drinking football culture. My first experiences of playing for the club included Sunday roasts and bitter lemons: entirely different from what I was used to in Scotland.

Geoff then moved his sights onto a different enemy: globalised fast food culture. The Slow Food movement began in Italy in 1986, opposing the fast pace of modern-day dining, the eradication of a daily, shared meal and the poor quality of processed ingredients flown thousands of miles round the world and consumed with indifference. He documented the movement in his 2008 book *The Slow Food Story*, just as the movement spread to the UK.

His work on Radio 4's *Food Programme* has fulfilled him and he has become close to the show's presenter, Sheila Dillon, and its producer, Dan Saladino. One bugbear, however, is that while Slow Food is a movement of the political Left in Italy, it has been embraced by the Right in the UK: David Cameron and pre-Tory MP Zac Goldsmith attended the launch of Slow Food UK at Borough Market. Can ideals such as making 'cheap' cuts of meat more popular and increasing the market for local food producers really compete in the globalised High Street? It's a problem which remains unsolved four years on.

Geoff juggles his academic duties with arduous journeys of culinary exploration across the globe. If you believe 'there's no such thing as a free, four-hour, ten course lunch', I can tell you you're wrong: I've heard anecdotes from around the world, recounting meals Geoff has enjoyed at farmers' tables, in cheese producers' dairies and at fishermen's grills. The seven-course tasting menu in a farm in Bra was perhaps the best meal we have shared. Then there was Damo becoming queasy at the Salcissa Di Bra, where Clarkey flummoxed a waitress by asking for a decaf cappuccino at the meal's conclusion. However, my favourite mealtime moments have been at Meson Bilbao, PFFC's adopted restaurant in Maida Vale, enjoying beautiful rioja and hazelnut liqueurs along with wholesome food. I hope Geoff's food odyssey will continue and that he will continue to share it with us all for a long time to come.

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as astute as ours are allowed to make mistakes". However, cometh the hour, cometh the Gaffer. Seeing the error of his tactical ways, Geoff reverted to a standard back four. PFFC mounted one of their most memorable comebacks, eventually running out 6-4 victors.

7. Crisis Gaffer Every season seems to have a catastrophic result in a game that marks a low point; 2002/03 was no exception. After a 4-2 defeat against Grafton FC in December, the reigning champions were in crisis. Cue Gaffer and a much needed kick up the arse via email. "We still have an excellent chance of winning this league if we win our remaining matches," he wrote. "In order to do it, we need to have 14 players at EVERY match. We also need more from the squad. Remember: we are the champions and we are defending our title. We now need to regroup and stand together and fight for the cause. OK?" We didn't lose another league game and retained our championship.

8. Gaffer's Gaffe After confidently declaring himself of sufficient ability to play for the mighty PFFC, a certain Tariq became the shortest-lived squad member ever. He was

introduced to the Gaffer before kick-off against TNT in September 2006 and was made a substitute. With twenty minutes remaining, Geoff brought him on as a sub for Andy. It soon transpired that poor Tariq had overestimated his ability, leaving Geoff wishing he could sub the sub.

9. Dogmatic Gaffer During our tour of Zürich in 2008, the Gaffer cajoled a reluctant Cornish AI to recite his famous PFFC poem (see page 2) during a post-tournament shindig. The Cornishman feared his in-jokes, comments relating to the Gaffer and oblique references would fall flat. Geoff insisted. AI obliged. The majority Swiss, Italian and Dutch audience were utterly non-plussed.

10. Bacchanalian Gaffer On the freezing evening of 25 February 2004 at Willesden, PFFC won their third title in a row. To celebrate, the Gaffer produced on the pitch two bottles of champagne. And two glasses. The champagne, says Cornish AI, speaks of Gaffer, the enjoyer of good things and the introducer to others of good things. The two glasses reveal a Gaffer without grandeur; the Gaffer of a student and worker heart. Bless you Gaffer.