

FA CUP UP AND A UNITED



THE players of Arsenal and Manchester United and their managers and coaches have been kept busy recently promising us all a momentous, memorable, magical FA Cup Final at Wembley this afternoon.

One would have to be deaf, dumb, blind, dead, illiterate, living in a cot, or too young to care not to know that the match is on.

Both teams have certainly been far too pre-occupied with making threatening noises at each other in the past few weeks to play much football.

Manchester United have won two out of their last 11. Arsenal are only marginally better with the same unimpressive number of victories from nine games.

Maybe they've all been suffering from ghost-writers' aneurysms?

If current form were the only make-they-we-would-be-watching two old teams today.

But what it does mean, of course, is that current form cannot be a reliable guide to the 1979 Cup Final. Neither team can possibly be as inert as recent results have suggested.

It also means that both teams have perhaps lost sight of an important objective—the considerable incentive that victory for either at Wembley today is the only sure way of ensuring a place in European competition next season.

Personally, I fervently hope that the game will be as good as Cup Finals normally are. And that will make me the eternal optimist.

I have missed only one Final since the last World War and most of them have been rubbish.

Through all the last twenty-five or thirty years I have found victory for the side that I follow, it is basically the other-but have still managed to get it right any time.

For those in a mood to mock I tipped Manchester City to beat Birmingham in 1969 and have been right only half a dozen since then. I am neither boasting nor complaining, merely stating facts.

But be honest. Most of the people who will be at Wembley this afternoon—whether they bought tickets the cheapest way or whether they helped Pat Stone Plasterer to get even better—we had judge a match like we're used to.

That is to compare the two teams and to make a judgement by department, examining the different

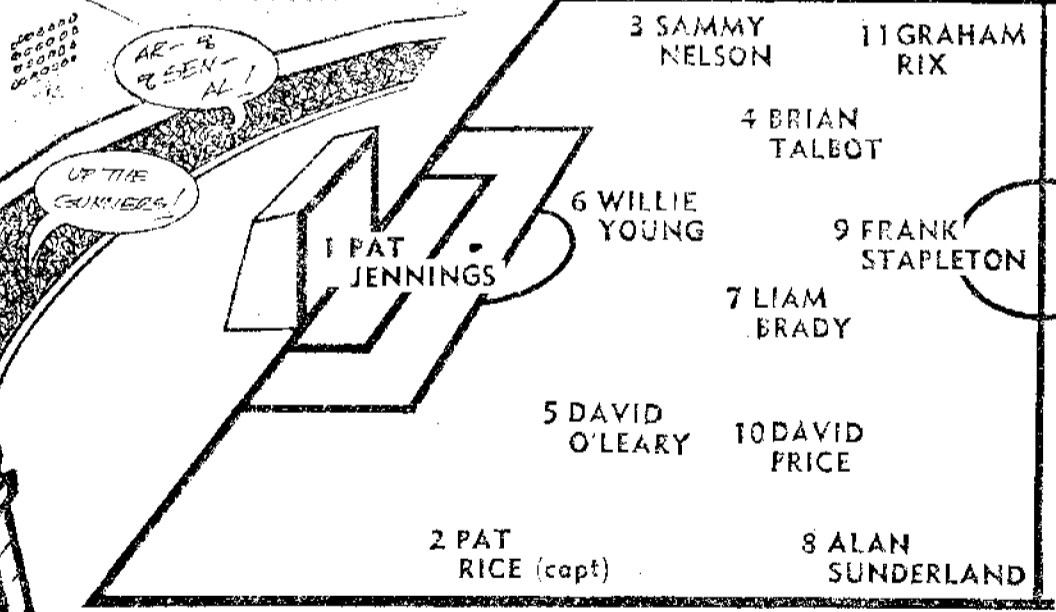


stats and skills to emerge with conclusion.

That is why I tipped Arsenal, not Manchester United, to win the FA Cup. Manchester United the year before, United to beat Southampton the year before that, Leeds to be Sunderland in 1973 and so on. Wrong again—and again and again and again.

Will I ever learn? No. The reason the football world does so often lead to the wrong forecast is that, thank God, our players' decisions are no more than a hand at cards.

Matches are not won or lost. You cannot bet on them for a moment.



TOP to bottom (left to right): Pat Jennings, Pat Rice, Sammy Nelson, David Price, Willie Young, David O'Leary, Brian Talbot, Graham Rix, Frank Stapleton, Steve Walford, Liam Brady and Alan Sunderland.

Substitute: STEVE WALFORD
 Colours.—Arsenal: Yellow shirts, blue shorts, yellow socks
 Referee: RON CHALLIS (Tonbridge). Linesmen: K. S. HALL
 REPLAY (IF NECESSARY): THURSDAY

FINAL '79 AT WEM ED!

field is the obvious exception. Here, on his day, as a player capable of commanding any occasion, one of the few in our domestic game who qualifies for that overworked adjective 'great'. If he has a game as good as he can then Arsenal will win.

But it is at least probable that United's own midfield of Steve Coppell, Lou Macari, Sammy McIlroy and Mike Thomas have a better balance.

Brady's talent imposes a burden on himself and the rest because they tend to play it all to him and through him so if he has an off day there is a smell of disaster in the air.

Comparisons between the two teams reach the same conclusion - there is nothing much to choose between them.

Take the defence. Ask Sexton and Neil whether they would do a straight swap involving Willie Young and David O'Leary for Gordon McQueen and Martin Buchan. Both would probably refuse - and give the same answer if you suggested a similar deal involving United striker Joe Jordan and Jimmy Greenhoff for Arsenal's Frank Stapleton and Alan Sunderland.

It helps to make it one of the most fascinating Cup Finals of recent years, but I have to feel that United's overall grand-street style is more tailored to the occasion than Arsenal's own more patient, probing game.

Drawings by CHARLES DUPONT

In today's game when Pat Jennings might slip on his backside, when Gary Bailey, the United keeper, might make a mistake in youthful naivety, when Joe Jordan might get sent off for having someone's teeth embedded in his elbow, when a player who seems certain to score somehow comes...

I have to go back to the tried and trusted method of measuring the known qualities of the two teams on view and, on balance, I believe United are better equipped for success.

I just hope they all remember it is, after all, only a game - though one that the world is watching.

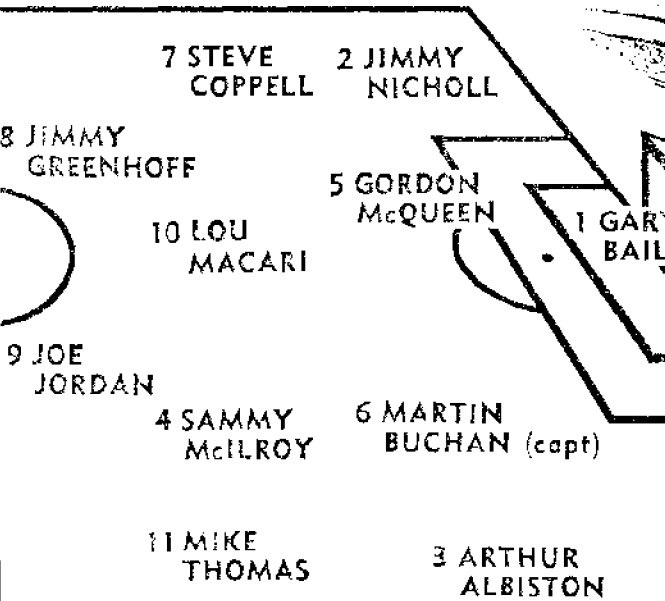
You win some, you lose some, but if you play it hopefully, adventurously, the world will enjoy it.

There is, in all truth, very little to choose between the two sides in terms of quality. Ask the respective managers Terry Neill, of Arsenal, and Dave Sexton, of United whether they would swap either individually or in sections with the opposition's equivalent and you wouldn't find many takers on either side.

Team lists in Arsenal's mid-



- BBC**
- 11.30 Cup Final Grandstand: Cup Final Morning.
 - 12.00 Road to Wembley.
 - 12.15 Mastermind
 - 12.55 Racing from Lingfield.
 - 1.10 Great names recalled.
 - 1.20 Racing from Lingfield.
 - 1.40 Inside Wembley.
 - 3.00 Kick-off.
 - 3.45 Half-time marching display.
 - 4.40 Presentation of Cup and medals.
 - 4.55 Meet the winners.
 - 5.05 Scottish Cup Final highlights.
- ITV**
- 11.30 World of Sport: 1979 Cup Final, Wembley '79.
 - 11.45 European Women's gymnastics.
 - 12.00 Cup Final Headline.
 - 12.25 Pools Check.
 - 12.30 Wrestling.
 - 1.00 Wembley '79.
 - 2.10 Wrestling.
 - 2.30 Wembley '79.
 - 3.00 Kick-off.
 - 3.45 Half-time verdict.
 - 4.40 Final whistle.
 - 5.05 News.
 - 5.15 Gymnastics



Substitute: BRIAN GREENHOFF

Manchester United: Red shirts, white shorts, black socks. SETT, Red flag; H. DEMPSEY, Yellow flag.
AY, MAY 17 AT WEMBLEY 7.45 P.M.

TOP to bottom (l to r): Gary Bailey, Arthur Albiston, Martin Buchan, Jimmy Nicholl, Gordon McQueen, Sammy McIlroy, Joe Jordan, Jimmy Greenhoff, Mike Thomas, Steve Coppell, Lou Macari, Brian Greenhoff.