

SCIENCE VERSUS THE CRAZY GANG: SYSTEMS AND CHARISMA IN FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT

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Protagonists in football management are forever seeking a competitive advantage over opponents. This search takes onboard both socio-cultural and scientific approaches designed to motivate players to perform to the best of their abilities. Such a belief system is pertinent to the military-soldiers need to be motivated to do their tasks, the responsibility for achieving this lies with the officers. What is considered effective changes over the years as new thinking comes along and gurus are proclaimed. What remains a constant in the case of both football and combat is the need to finish as the victors; the search for successful playing systems thus never ends. The appointment of Egil Olsen as coach of the Norwegian national football team in 1990 coincided with the rapid professionalization of football in Norway. His success (primarily at youth level football) was largely based on what were perceived to be 'scientific' training methods combined with match analysis he developed with colleagues at the Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education. Although notorious in the eyes of foreign critics for its defensive and 'long-ball' tactics, the success achieved by the national side under Olsen meant that a 'Norwegian style' of play was invented. Olsen's success did not go unnoticed or unappreciated outside Norway. In 1999 he was appointed manager of the English Premier League team Wimbledon FC, a club that had enjoyed a phenomenal rise in status over the previous 20 years, premised largely on its irreverent stance towards pomposity and the prevailing ideas of rationality in the English game. Their irreverence saw them celebrate their notoriety with the nomenclature of 'The Crazy Gang'. Unorthodox in all they did they were to prove-at times- a nightmare to manage. This presentation examines how Olsen's positivist/ scientific approach to football clashed with the cultural and mythological preconditions of an English football club. There could only be one winner.