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THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD

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It could only end in tears. Almost as predictable as night turning into day, England crashed out of this year's World Cup quarter final losing to Portugal on penalties. After much bluster and empty proclamations of Beckham and co. being the 'Golden Generation', this result confirmed what many pundits secretly feared but didn't dare admit: that England's stars simply didn't have the mental tenacity to win football's greatest prize.

At the heart of perhaps England's most disappointing World Cup performance since 1966 was the team's controversial manager Sven-Goran Eriksson. The Swedish native was criticized for his eccentric team selection - including the inclusion of untested 17-year-old Theo Walcott - erratic tactics, and favouritism towards off form senior players.

'The Successful Loser'

But when the dust settles and the bitter taste of failure is washed away, a quick examination of the statistics tells a different story about Eriksson's five-year reign. The 'successful loser' - a term of endearment coined by the Italians during the Swede's time in Serie A - doesn't look so bad on paper. In fact, he's the second most successful England manager of all time, trailing behind the legendary Sir Alf Ramsey in terms of the percentage of games won. What defined Eriksson's tenure though was his fractious relationship with the hysterical English tabloids and the bespectacled manager's dalliance with off the pitch controversy.

Football Heaven

The job of England manager is certainly no role for the faint hearted. What some say is the most coveted position in world football, it's also one of the most daunting. Expectation is paramount before major tournaments from a country that is desperate for glory on the global stage. The first official England manager was Sir Walter Winterbottom in 1946. The most celebrated was the aforementioned Ramsey who bought football home for the first and only time 40 years ago.

Other highpoints have been the reigns of Sir Bobby Robson who reached the semi-finals of the World Cup in 1990 and Terry Venables who steered his country to the semis of the 1996 European Championships. Both managers saw their team knocked out on penalties at the hands of the Germans.

Tabloid Hell

But the job has also turned heroes into villains. Graham Taylor's disastrous Euro 92 campaign led to the Sun newspaper morphing his head into a turnip, splashing him across its front page. Matters reached crisis point after England's failure to qualify for the 94 World Cup was documented in an infamous Channel 4 documentary where Taylor muttered the now immortal line 'Do I Not Like That'.

After guiding England to the second round of France 98, former Tottenham Hotspurs midfield legend Glenn Hoddle was sacked for expressing some rather unconventional religious beliefs. His views caused such an outrage that British Prime Minister Tony Blair was forced to intervene.

Despite Eriksson's passive demeanour in the dugout, his regular appearances in the tabloids proved that there was more to the 5-million-pound-a-year man than met the eye. His much-documented romantic escapades have even been the inspiration behind a 'tragicomic

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play' that has recently opened in the Swedish capital, Stockholm.

Meet the New Boss

This month sees a new dawn for England as Eriksson's successor Steve McClaren takes the helm. But it could have been so much different. The Football Association's first choice was none other than Luiz Felipe Scolari - Sven's World Cup nemesis - but the Brazilian was horrified by the intensity of the tabloids after rumours of his appointment surfaced. McClaren was Eriksson's number two and it's paramount that he immediately establishes himself as his own man.

Like his old boss, the former Middlesbrough coach has a wealth of unmitigated talent at his disposal, but will he have the nerve to capture the Holy Grail - a semi-final (or dare we say it - final) appearance in a major tournament?

*August 2006
-Ben Lupton*

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