**A powerful motivator**

A wag in the office remarked that I should write about football and John Harbin should write about life. Actually JH knows a good deal about life, whereas my understanding and knowledge about football remains very amateur. That said, in the great tradition of the British Public House Pundit, I am going to hold forth about football matters and strengthen the argument that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing…

I’m always intrigued at how struggling clubs get a new manager in and instantly – with the same squad as the failing manager before them – the team picks up, looks completely different on the pitch. What changes? The tactics? The training techniques? Well yes both of those no doubt, but there’s something more. A complex cocktail of motivation, confidence and spirit. Who knows how to lose it, who knows how to manufacture it, but everyone can recognise when it is missing.

In football, as in so many sports, the higher up you get the finer are the margins of success. The differences in skill and ability can be quite small, and other elements of performance become crucial. Like motivation for instance.

So what motivates professional sports people? And what demotivates players? I’ve heard a lot of talk in the media and elsewhere about the types who seem content to pick up their wages and go through the motions without fighting too hard for their first team place. But I’ve also noticed that in all professional sports people internal motivation to win is always very strong. As I said: it’s complex and I’m no expert, but I do observe.

And I observe people in everyday life as well, because as with football so with the rest of life. All of us have different levels of personal drive, and we all have a bit of ebb and flow when it comes to getting up and at ‘em on any given day.

What motivates you to be the best person you can be? Are you quite well self-motivated or do you need someone shouting from the sidelines to urge you on to greater things (or just urge you to get off the sofa and mowing the lawn)? I can tell you with some confidence that someone who has been affirmed and encouraged as a child will have a good sense of self-esteem as an adult and will be more likely to be self-motivated to look after themselves and achieve personal goals in life. Which leads me to admire even more those who haven’t had lots of positive affirmation as a child and yet are still able to motivate themselves to achieve, make good choices and have a well cut lawn (behind every successful man stands a surprised woman).

We have lots of sporting analogies in the Bible which shows us that the link between sport and motivation can work both ways. St Paul calls upon us to train spiritually as athletes train for big events, and he talks of us being cheered on by crowds of witnesses to do our best in life. Some sort of connection with God is what we need to affirm our significance and worth in this world, which in turn gives us the strength to step out secure in our identity, to know in our knower that we’re worth something. For God so loves you that he gave his only son that you should not perish but have eternal life!

You need a strong internal drive to succeed in life, and people around you to help you and cheer you on. Encouragement is a powerful motivator, and the best encouragement comes from God himself. And John Harbin if he’s around.