

# FAREWELL TO THE



## **Steve Corrigan:**

So, the dust has now settled on Sean Dyche's time at Turf Moor and what to make of it all? It was certainly not the way either he or the fans wanted or expected his managership to end. It is also safe to say that for most Burnley fans, it has presented many of the best moments we have had watching the Clarets. I have said many times over recent seasons that we really needed to be enjoying these times because they won't last for ever and we would get relegated at some point (hopefully not this season though). That wasn't being negative or pessimistic, it was just being realistic and emphasising the need to enjoy every moment.

When he took over, the Clarets were forever cash-strapped, perennial strugglers in the Championship, not even flirting with the heady heights of the play-offs. To take us from that to renew our long-lost acquaintance with competitive European football was an incredible rise that we could never have dreamed of.

At times, you had to pinch yourself, it was that unrealistic, and yet there were always the few that thought we should be doing better, complaining about the lack of expenditure on incoming transfers. How much of that was the Board's issue, and Mike Garlick in particular, and how much was down to Sean we will probably never know for sure. Both took a lot of stick over it, much of it way beyond what was acceptable. All despite the fact that Burnley were a debt-free, stable Premier League club. Victims of their own success, perhaps?

But back on the pitch, what Sean achieved was nothing short of remarkable. In two full seasons in the Championship, he was promoted both times – the second time finishing with a 23-game unbeaten run to charge to the title. He obviously learnt a lot from that first relegation from the Premier League, it ultimately stood the Clarets in good stead the second time round. Despite some poor runs at times, the Clarets hadn't really looked back since then until this season. Maybe it made some of us immune to his failings at times. Was his stubbornness and faithfulness a strength

or a weakness? The lack of substitutions at times was frustrating. When the tactics of balls in behind the defence and up to the front two worked, it was great to see the big boys getting riled. When it didn't work, it was tough to watch. The missed opportunities in the Cup, particularly the Lincoln game, were maddening, but as long as he kept delivering in the League, it was fine.

Even this season, the crowd was still very much in the main supportive of Dyche and the team, despite the poor results. Boos were few and far between. Rightly, they had earned that with their track record of survival, and most of us still thought he was the best man for the job. The margins were, indeed, fine. The effort was there, but not taking chances and getting punished for mistakes was making results hard to come by.

But enough of the issues this season – we should be celebrating the past nine seasons. Burnley beat all of the big guns, several on their own patch. At the same time, Dyche helped build a fantastic infrastructure and started uplifting the Academy. He remained unbeaten against that lot down the road. He took Burnley to Europe, and despite not playing well got through two rounds and only lost to a team that qualified from the Champions League group stages the following season. If it was a fictional story, you would dismiss it as unrealistic.

He brought us great phrases like 'Legs, hearts, minds' and 'Minimum requirement is maximum effort' and when you watched his teams you believed it. Sometimes you wanted a bit more composure and quality, but also at times you got it. Who can forget Barnes's goal against Wigan or Hendrick's at Everton? Quality passing moves. So many times, the Clarets were written off, yet this seemed to galvanise Dyche and his players, and they created some great upsets.

Sean Dyche's greatest moments:

- Blackburn 1 Burnley 2 – that first win in so long!
- Burnley 2 Wigan 0 – the promotion clincher and a performance to savour
- Chelsea 2 Burnley 3 – leading the Premier League Champions 3–0 in the first game of the season on their own patch
- Liverpool 0 Burnley 1 – ending their long, unbeaten home run
- Manchester United 0 Burnley 2 – after coming so close previously and a Jay Rod screamer to boot
- Burnley v Tottenham – in the snowstorm out on the pitch without a coat or even a jumper as the game was postponed
- Getting Jurgen Klopp so upset that the Liverpool boss chased him down the tunnel at Anfield (only to pull up pretty quickly when Big Sean turned around)
- His press conferences that generated many a hilarious moment from answering a reporter's phone, to talking about eating worms and gargling gravel to the lookie-likie game.

So thank you Sean, you have truly earned the epithet of 'Burnley Legend'. The club would not be where they are without your efforts. Good luck (almost) wherever you go and keep proving the doubters wrong.

## **Tim Quelch**

Burnley fans are wondering whether Dyche's adherence to his chosen framework became too much of a cage for his players in recent times. Predictably, the severely depleted team overseen

by Michael Jackson stumbled at the final hurdle after mounting a brave, if improbable, recovery in the final months. It was good to see the players displaying greater freedom, zest & creativity under Jackson, playing more to feet and exchanging passes quickly to break through their opponents' presses.

For all that, I'm very disappointed to lose our best manager of the last half century, if not longer. His achievement of keeping Burnley in the 'EPL' for six successive seasons, including an unexpected tilt in Europe, is nothing short of miraculous, given the size of the club and its town and its comparatively small resources. I suspect the lockdown constraints taxed him hugely, despite his denial of suffering undue pressure. Certainly, he considered Burnley's escape from relegation in 2020/21 to be his greatest feat thus far.

His relationship with former chairman, Mike Garlick appeared to falter during the latter years working together, with allegations that they did not see eye to eye over transfers. I cannot comment upon the truth of this save to quote Mike Garlick, who insisted to me that there was money available for incoming moves before the 2020/21 season started. The harsh reality is that the club now face a worrying financial future with a fire sale of its best players mooted by many fans. Whether these fears become fact or not, we should remain proud of what this small club in a deprived area has achieved in the last eight years. Let's raise a toast to that.



**After the win at Stamford Bridge, August 2017**

## **Andrew Firmin**

The whole thing ended in an extremely unclassy way: sacked out of the blue on Good Friday, two days before the next game. This wasn't how it ought to have ended.

For what it's worth, I'd resigned myself to relegation and hadn't particularly enjoyed most games this season. But my first reaction was that the sacking reeked of panic and I wasn't convinced the owners had a plan. A couple of weeks after the end of the season, I've seen nothing to persuade me otherwise.

This season I'd slowly come round to the view that change was necessary. But that came with the feeling that the classy thing to do would be to wait until the end of the season and then have a parting of the ways, something that would have allowed Sean Dyche and his backroom team to leave with dignity and given the crowd a chance for thanks and farewells. The club did something similar when they decided to end Stan Ternent's time in charge, but that was when the directors

understood Burnley.



I said at the time that the only way the decision to sack Dyche with eight games left could be justified was if we stayed up. Well, we didn't, so it wasn't. What we got was the classic short-term change-of-manager bounce that lasted for half the remaining games, something that seemed to encourage our inexperienced owners to delay making a decision on a proper replacement. Ultimately that left us going into crucial games with an over-promoted member of the coaching staff in charge who was clearly doing his best but made some poor tactical and team selection choices, particularly in the final crucial game. The gamble failed. We might as well have taken the classy approach.

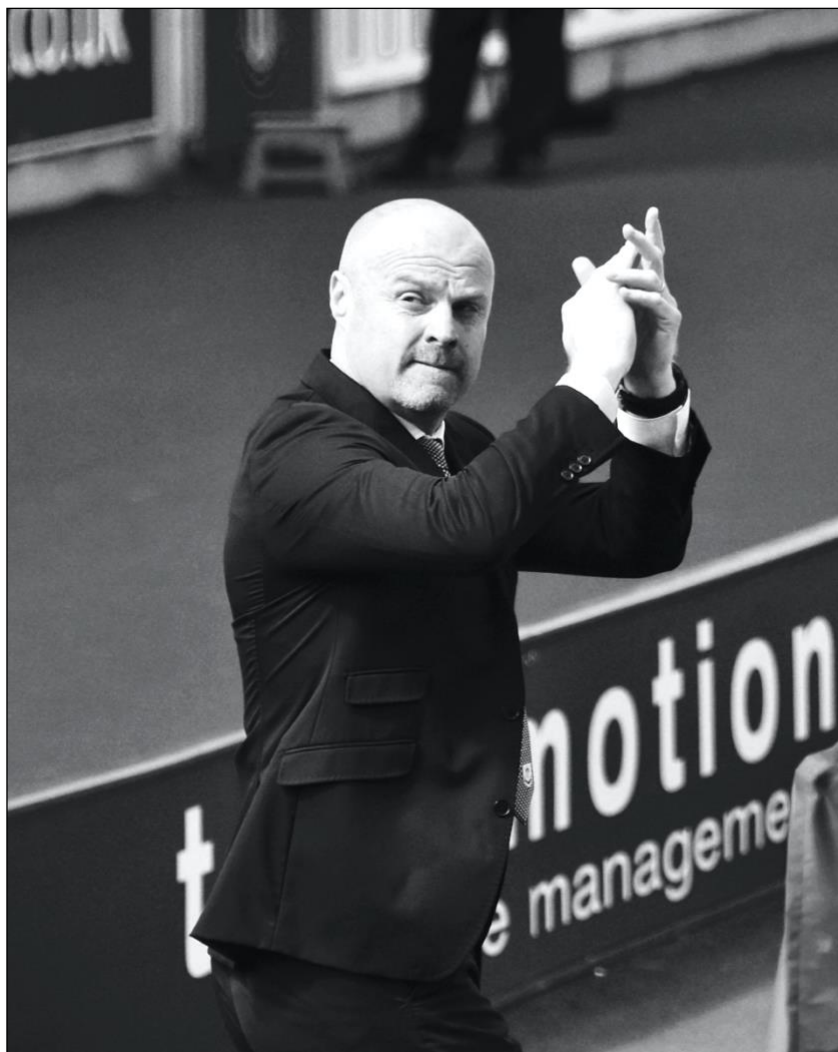
I can't imagine it will ever happen again – to have the same person in charge for close to a decade, moulding the club in his own image, radically changing supporters' expectations. The new owners will appoint someone who fits and is subservient to their vision – whatever that may be. But they have Dyche to thank for turning the club into one they wanted to take over in the first place.

Dyche changed everything. He came into a so-so second-tier club, penniless and with no expectation of promotion; if anything, we looked nervously the other way. On a shoestring he left us as a club that spent most of his time in the premier league, having played in European competition and supplied a string of international players. As supporters, we got used to making trips to the football giants in Liverpool, London and Manchester as a matter of routine, seeing ourselves on Match of the Day and part of the football bullshit opinion industry. In short, he built the club that Alan Pace and his associates have the duty of not messing up. It's hard to imagine such owners taking an interest in the skint and drifting club Dyche started with.

Of course by the end we were well past the peak. Nothing lasts forever. The ageing of the squad and the lack of regular turnover needed to keep it fresh counted against us. We weren't bringing in the players we needed to – we thought because we were being prudent, but now it's clear it was to fatten the club up to make it attractive for takeover. There can only be diminishing returns in applying the same framework for so long. Players with hundreds of games under their belt must

have wearied of the repetition and craved variety.

It should be said, however, that Dyche was less of a route-one 4-4-2 dinosaur than he was characterised as. There was under-acknowledged tactical variation, at least until the last couple of seasons. And it wasn't all dour. We played effective, entertaining football when we went 23 games undefeated and when we finished seventh. Those were up there with the most enjoyable seasons I've spent following Burnley. Only in the last couple of seasons did it get more reductive, an attempt at a safety-first response to thinning resources.



Dyche will be alright. He'll walk into the next lower-rung Premier League club that starts the season badly or bigger-spending second-tier club, likewise. But what about us? It's all on the new regime now to show us whether they're serious about this, or just dilettantes playing at running a football club with other people's money. The task in hand is huge: find a new manager, replace half a team and get us back up before our massive debt wipes us out.

We'll also need to forge a new identity. Dyche was here so long and had so much influence that he shaped the modern identity of Burnley FC. So much of our brand is enmeshed with his. For a whole generation of football fans Burnley are known as a defiant, obdurate or annoying side, depending on how generously you look at it, a mostly British, hardworking and honest team that stays in the Premier League year after year, loyal to our manager even when relegated, locally owned and sensibly run, rejoicing in being different. Now it's all gone. We're foreign owned, in huge debt, out of Premier League and we make panicky managerial sackings. We've become just yet another club, indistinguishable from those we'll be rubbing shoulders with. Who are we going to be next?

While the future looks gloomy, I'll remain thankful for the journey Dyche took us on: two promotions, 7,000 people rocking the away end at Preston, dancing on the pitch at Charlton, beating all the big sides at least once (personal favourites: Stamford Bridge, 12 August 2017; Old Trafford, 22 January 2020), an authentic European experience in Athens and players who now occupy most slots in my all-time Burnley 11. What a time it was. Thanks for it all, Gaffer.