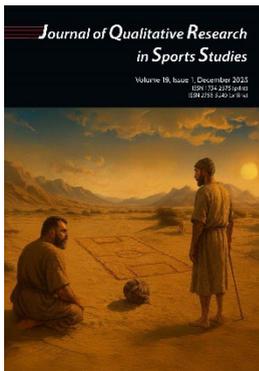


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A football scout's inward quest for meaning: Interpreting auto-phenomenographic data through a creative turn

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A football scout's inward quest for meaning: Interpreting auto-phenomenographic data through a creative turn

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Keywords: *football scouting, phenomenology, storytelling, songwriting, lived experience*

Abstract

This article explores the lived experiences of professional football scouts through a deeply reflexive and highly creative analytical inquiry. Drawing on phenomenological and auto-ethnographic traditions, specifically auto-phenomenography, this research challenges the conventional norms of data handling in qualitative research i.e. the processes of data collection, analysis and data presentation. This is achieved by privileging depth and richness of personal experience in the field; a 'reaching inwards', over breadth and often tangential missions of data collection that typically 'reach outwards' from the researcher at the centre of operations. In this study the researcher is seen as his own 'data-site' and looks for opportunities within the sphere of his lived experience to inform his thinking. By delving inwards to the topic and the person - represented by our 'Russian doll' concept - the invitation to tell richer stories in ever more creative but also revealing ways about the scouting world in football is fully embraced. While this research involved semi-structured interviews at the start, it was the reflexivity from immersive ethnographic fieldwork that has really informed this research. Thus, the data has been analysed not by generating codes and themes, but through a process of revisiting, refining and re-thinking in a quest for meaning. This has led to the data being transformed into creative episodes, artistic offerings and performances that tell vividly the emotional and existential textures of *being* in the life-worlds of football scouting. The study employs storytelling, poetry, imagery and songwriting as interpretive tools, revealing nuanced insights into identity, marginality and professional ambiguity within the scouting profession. Characters such as *Eamon The Eel* and *Clairvoyant Cliff* serve as composite figures that anonymise participants while enriching narrative clarity. The use of the Voice-Centred Relational Method (VCRM) invites readers to connect with the scouting underworld, offering participatory engagement (please visit the QR codes), and deeper understanding. The paper concludes with the '10 Commandments', which are a set of edicts born from experience and shaped in this research, closing with a final song, *Ode to the Scout*, which reminds us of the existential angst of the scout, as overlooked and lacking a defined essence, but is, paradoxically, essential to success.



Introduction

The collection, interpretation and presentation of data is one of the most challenging aspects of qualitative research which often leaves the neophyte researcher pondering ‘have I done enough interviews?’ or ‘have I got sufficient themes?’ This usually sends the discombobulated inquirer on a trolley dash down the qualitative-data-aisle, collecting more and more in the hope of answering their research question. Conversely, and to remedy this situation, our aim is to show how our research endeavour has moved inwardly, going deeper, doing more with what is already known and embodied, rather than moving outwardly, going wider and potentially seeing things more superficially.

Methodologically, this research sought to delve into the lived experience of professional football scouts through employing both phenomenological and auto-ethnographic approaches. The amalgamation of these approaches is not new and has been termed by Gruppetta (2004), amongst others, as ‘auto-phenomenography’. Gruppetta (2004:4) explains that,

If an auto-ethnographic researcher analyses her/his own experiences of a phenomenon rather than of a ‘cultural place’ (as would be the case in an auto-ethnographic study), then the appropriate term would be ‘auto-phenomenography’.

Therefore, this methodological approach was used to shed light on the murky and largely unexplored world of professional football scouting (Lawlor, Rookwood and Wright, 2021). The approach drew inspiration from existentially informed hermeneutic phenomenology (Willig and Billin, 2011), which primarily aims to deepen our understanding of the quality, texture and meaning of a particular experience for those who undergo that experience. It lends itself to the exploration of human experiences which speak to our relationship with time, with our bodies, our physical environment and with other people. Consequently, auto-phenomenography is an appropriate methodology to deploy in this study, as the existential lens of *being* in the scouting world is used to interpret experiences hermeneutically. Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation of human intention, beliefs, actions or the meaning of human experience (George, 2025). Accordingly, this research draws upon both hermeneutic and existentialist traditions to explore and interpret the life-worlds of football scouts, recognising the significance of personal meaning-making and contextual understanding of their lived experiences.

Collecting data and other ‘rubbish’

At the very start of this study, that is, at formal research proposal stage and ethics application, it was assumed that the external act of gathering information from other scouts, about *their* lived experiences, was *the* thing to do. That is, only others’ accounts of experience counted as *real* data, not my own. After a laborious right-of-passage was earned from writing an extensive literature review, mainly to satisfy

others about my academic discipline, could interviewing commence. Looking back, that lit review exercise was a waste of time; wrong literature as things have turned out. Nevertheless, early in the study eight semi-structured interviews were conducted, accessing participants through gatekeepers, seeking informed consent and diligently transcribing interviews. Through such methods of data collection, as championed by Blommaert and Jie (2010), ‘rubbish bags’ full of data were collected.

The problem that gradually dawned upon me, was that while I was using my experience, or more, my reputation as a successful scout to gain access the world of football scouting, I was ignoring my own rich stock of experience of being a football scout. I already had 6 years of total immersion in the football scouting world and was still engaged in extensive conversations with scouts, in person, either at a game or on the phone, which were becoming an unstoppable tide of almost daily contact with scouts. This contact was informing my new reflexivity on the lived experience of football scouting. In essence, I was researching them while also being one of them. So, how could I exploit my insider knowledge? It was the realisation that I am my own data site, and that I am my own field of research, which triggered the creative turn to analysing the lived experience of football scouting in the way I have done.

The Russian doll data concept



Moving from left to right (1-4), the inner stories of the scout are revealed, each phase of ‘reaching in’ yielding progressively richer insights to experience and meaning, inviting more creative ways of telling the tale.

The thinking behind the Russian doll data concept is that the valuable auto-phenomenological data is already held within the person, embodied by the auto-researcher in this case. The assumption is that rich stories yet to be told are hidden until discovered. The decision to reach inwards rather than out, became the most effective way of probing for meaning through the exploration of multi-layered lived experiences in scouting. From that point on, the study focused on interpreting and presenting data in increasingly creative mediums, each song or poem lifting another doll, each time becoming richer and more vibrant when shared with the scouting community (Lawlor and Palmer 2023; 2024; Lawlor, Palmer, Lee and Smith, 2024).



Signalling this change in how I would go about my research after the initial interview stage, I made this reflexive note in my diary:

Analysing my interview data is prompting me to reflect on my lived experiences as a football scout, which feels like opening up a Russian doll of experiences. I think my early conclusions from interviews were somewhat broad and thin, failing to get to the heart of the matter. Whereas later conclusions, with deeper reflection, were more nuanced, subtle and actually to a large degree, more obvious.

My supervisor asked me to sing my data at a conference, which I did. I thought he was mad, but it was great. However new insights only became 'obvious' at the end of that creative process. These new insights could not have been arrived at by collecting data the old way i.e. more of the same old stuff. New more interesting interpretations of experience were emerging from refining data much deeper within me.

Revisiting and refining: a methodological choice

By rejecting traditional qualitative coding and themes generation as the primary means of data analysis, a process of revisiting and refining data was embraced. This became the central driving force for this research, creating momentum through a reflexive process of data analysis and using increasingly creative ideas for data presentation. Qualitative 'restudies' and 'retheorising' are becoming more common in qualitative research, but these tend to revisit existing coded data sets, being treated as a secondary analysis of data collected by other researchers, sometimes decades before (e.g. Köhler, Rumyantseva and Welch, 2023; Bishop and Kuula-Luumi 2017; Camfield and Palmer-Jones, 2013). On this count, my research differed significantly as it was my primary phenomenological data being revisited and re-interpreted which I then converted into different aesthetic and artistic forms, all in my quest for meaning. Discovering issues of identity crisis and often self-doubt in scouts, I followed a rich seam of existential questioning to develop the creative episodes.

Each creative turn drew upon new aesthetic criteria to define and shape a particular form, and also to judge its quality. This set new discipline boundaries to crafting each episode; from story, to song, to poem etc., but all the time remaining true to the facets of the lived experience in scouting. (See the 'run credits' listing at the end of this article for the range of different creative skills which have been deployed in the course of this research). Any process of analysis, particularly in qualitative research, will be a product of selection and rejection – deciding what to keep and what to get rid of. From this reductive exercise, and refining fewer items in greater depth, a clearer picture emerged when the less relevant data-content was rejected. Through the constant revisiting to the stories and songs to refine them, or in some cases to completely re-interpret them, greater insight and connection to the scouting community has been achieved. This progressive experimentation has meant that this research has been both a methodical and methodological process. In short, each aesthetic refinement and crafting of an artistic episode has yielded greater insight and deeper meanings.

However, for the process of revisiting and refining to take hold in my study, it needed a kick-start. This came unexpectedly from finding myself, quite early on in my study, at the end of a bleak data-cul-de-sac, lined with overhanging NVivo trees, blocking out the light with their long stringy nodes, codes and thorny attributes. I was feeling rather lost. So, my PhD supervisor encouraged me to put aside my transcripts and write a story. I relished the thought, and the freedom. The story *Taking in a Game* is what I wrote at the time, the title developing with subsequent crafting into *Taking in a game – a glimpse through the lens of a nowhere man* [story 1]. The refining of that first story drew me to reflect more closely on the events I was writing about. Little did I appreciate that *Taking in a Game* would be the first jigsaw piece in a whole puzzle that I would create and piece together.

The opportunity to share my story *Taking in a Game* at a conference arose (Lawlor and Palmer, 2023a), but my supervisor, realising that I could not just read six pages of story to an academic audience, told me to sing it to them instead! So I did, and the song *40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll* was born. The song was a reduction and synthesis of key ingredients in the longer story – a rich consommé of the original product, performed to a live audience. The song was just 8 verses with a chorus, or refrain, which the audience could participate in. As a measure of my reductive analysis the story *Taking in a Game* is 3209 words long and takes about 30 minutes to read, however the song is only 358 words and takes 3 mins 58 seconds to sing – but it has the same messages and meaning as its parent story. I later had the opportunity to translate and transform the song, and my performance of it into Spanish, bringing about a whole new level of revisiting and meaning making though the cultural lens of a different language. This initial dataset of the first story and song went through six phases of refining, analysis and interpretation (see Palmer, 2025).

In the nine creative episodes that follow you will encounter such characters as *Eamon The Eel*, the slippery Head of Recruitment, *Clairvoyant Cliff* (I told you so) and *The Corporal* (the ever disillusioned and disappointed) alongside a number of others. Before and after each creative episode a ‘Scout Report’ is made, the like of which I had to write after every match I observed, but here they act as segways to link the stories and songs. The ‘reports’ recount my search for meaning in the scouts’ lived experiences and to shed some light on the interpretation and refinement of the data that has contributed to each piece. This will not only provide an evidence trail for that process, but it may also be a useful guide on how others might use their data in creative ways to discover deeper, richer meanings from their research.

Invitation:

Please scan and activate the QR codes and I will perform my data for you.

[e.g. **SONG:** *40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll*]:



**Sequence of 10 Scout Report segways –
linking 9 creative episodes**

Scout Report One

STORY:

Taking in a game – a glimpse through the lens of a nowhere man

Scout Report Two

SONG:

40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll

Scout Report Three

SONG:

40 Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas

Scout Report Four

STORY:

Into the Unknown: A Scout's Tale

Scout Report Five

POEM:

The Game Doesn't Care

Scout Report Six

SONG:

The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff

Scout Report Seven

STORY:

The Outsider

Scout Report Eight

STORY:

The 10 Commandments of Football Scouting

Scout Report Nine

SONG:

The Ode to the Scout

Scout Report Ten

Scout Report One

The first creative episode was written as a reflection on my experiences of 'taking in a game', a common expression used by scouts to signify a game which, in the grand scheme of things, lacks importance. There isn't necessarily a player who needs watching and it's unlikely that the scout will recommend, and the club will subsequently not sign any of the players on display. This was not just a finding from my own lived experiences but also shared when interpreting the experiences of others. There are several reasons why this first encounter is presented in storied form. Firstly, creative analytical practices such as the crafting and telling of stories are a novel way in which researchers can interpret and represent the social reality of those they encounter in the field (Middleton et al., 2025). Likewise, the concept of researcher reflexivity was important early in the process to bring assumptions about identity, practice and power to the surface, something which is crucial when researching sporting contexts (Holt and Knight, 2014). Another aim of 'Taking in a game' therefore is to alert the reader to my own experiences and potential biases in the scouting world. This is something championed by many authors who want to investigate the lived experiences of others. As Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) claim, autoethnographic methods make the researcher's reflexive position part of the research text, turning, they claim, subjectivity into analytic resource. It also allows readers to experience what it is like to be a football scout. Additionally, it offers the reader an insight into some of the archetypes, characters and relationships that they will encounter for the remainder of this paper. Crucially, this method of dissemination allows for the masking and anonymisation of participants. None of the scouts encountered in the upcoming story exist. They are composite characters, amalgams of scouts I encountered in the field during the data collection phase of this research. This deliberate merging of several people into one composite figure protects identities and preserves narrative clarity, 'using literary craft to render factual material with the narrative energy and stylistic care of fiction' (Gutkind, 2000).



STORY

**Taking in a game - a
glimpse through the lens of
a Nowhere Man**

Taking in a game

A glimpse through the lens of a Nowhere Man

I walk up the damp concrete steps from the concourse, and the cold winter wind hits me, as does the sound of '90s Britpop over the old tannoy. I squint in the light of the floodlights high above the damp and muddy playing surface. I make my way down to my seat; notebook, pen and team sheet, the scout's toolkit, in one hand, polythene cup in the other – not sure yet if it's tea or coffee, I just said 'yes please' to the lady in the lounge when she asked if I wanted a drink. I make my way past the seated fanatics, head-to-toe in replica hats, scarves and coats and the familiar smell of meat pies and Bovril. Down to my right I see them, the scouts, my peers, the Nowhere Men. I decided to wear my nice coat and smart shoes tonight, I don't know why, it's bloody freezing. I suppose it's so I look a bit more 'professional' because I want to feel professional, like I've made it, like I'm a somebody. I do look a bit out of place though, everyone else is in big, warm coats and hats.

I make my way to row J, seat 37 where I sit down, two seats down from a scout I don't know. He's youngish, young for the industry anyway, probably mid 30s. He doesn't say a word and doesn't look up. His eyes flick between his phone and his notepad where he's already busy taking notes. We're all here to make notes about players in the game but the game hasn't even started yet, I've got no idea what he's writing.

I'm sat in front of three old-timers, residuals, the backbone of the industry – Hitchcock, McIntosh, and Morris. Morris is the first to pipe up, 'Here, did you hear about Nigel? He's got the sack; he found out he'd lost his job from Sky Sports News!' McIntosh replies, 'Aye but they've agreed to keep him on part-time, haven't they? Not bad, gets £20K to go to a few games a week and just chuck a report in'. Hitchcock wipes his nose and intervenes, 'Still, better than what happened to Bob, he got sacked by text! It's a bloody disgrace'. The three of them ramble on incessantly as the teams complete their final preparations ahead of kick off.

I avert my attention from the old timers and notice Summers sat on his own, smartly dressed, newly whitened teeth and he's on the phone. He was a hero in his playing days, I remember watching him on tele when I was a kid and in a funny way it gives him this aura of greatness. I've got no idea if he's any good at scouting, but he sure looks the part. He's talking numbers and work permits, probably speaking to an agent, he seems to know his stuff. He doesn't look up from his pristine leather boots as the teams enter the field of play. I hear Hitchcock's voice again, 'I've only come to watch him', pointing at a name on his team sheet. He's not in the starting eleven. 'What a waste of time' he says indifferently shrugging his shoulders, 'He'll probably only get 10 minutes at the end!' McIntosh replies sharply, 'Aye but you'll leave on 70 minutes anyway, so it doesn't matter if he comes on or not!' The three of them laugh. 'Alright then, who are you watching Macca?' asks Hitchcock mockingly, 'No one really, I wanna get a look at Thompson, he'll never play for our lot, he can't play in a two, but I'll put my report in anyway just to cover myself'. 'We've watched him a few times

Macca, half of our lot like him, the other half don't', responds Morris, 'they keep telling me everything he can't do, why not tell me what he can do! Scouts don't do that enough these days'. They all nod in unison.

The game kicks off. I hear a rush next to me as Townsend, one of the good guys, middle aged, former analyst squeezes into the seat next to me. 'Evening. Didn't think I was going to make it, just got here from an Under 23s game', he says, panting. 'Managed to get something to eat on the way here though, so that's a win, I'll put that on the expenses!' He immediately opens a professional looking folder full of scraps of paper, team sheets, jottings of formations and other ambiguous scribbles. 'I see we're sat behind the geriatrics' he says with a laugh and immediately starts writing on his pad with an expensive looking biro. He's writing a report on every player tonight. 'Two or three lines on every player, that's what you need to do' is one of his signature phrases.

The game isn't great, there's no real ebb or flow, the ball changes hands frequently on a bobbly, muddy pitch. Both sides are jam packed with older players who've made their money and careers in the higher leagues and don't look too enthusiastic about a lower league game on a December night in the northwest of England. There's a smattering of interesting players, an 18-year-old on loan from a top division side, a few Academy graduates in their early 20s but they can't impose themselves on such a disjointed game. I look down at Summers, he's on his phone again. He can't have watched more than 5 minutes so far in the first half. Townsend nudges me, 'Look at that twat, some scout he is, he's been on his phone the whole time'. He shakes his head with his eyes still fixated on the game, 'Apparently, he's on £100K. He only got the job because he used to play with the gaffer there. Classic football nepotism, what a joke. I hear he's on the take as well'. I ask him what he means, he replies, 'He's using the same agent all the time, Jake reckons he's taking a cut of every deal!'

There's a break in play due to an injury from a heavy tackle and the players jog over to the dugout for a mouthful of water and some angry exchanges with their respective managers. I take a moment to listen to the old boys sat in front; it's typical scouting chat. 'That centre half's got a foot like a sheriff's badge! He nearly took someone's head off with that pass earlier' laughs Hitchcock. Then Morris responds, 'Yeah, but he's better than the lad they've got at centre back, look at him (pointing). Typical Caribbean attitude, bloody lazy.' which was more racial slur than any serious assessment of physical effort, and totally oblivious to the fact that the player in question is French. 'Speaking of which, have you seen Godson at our place? He's a lazy git, he's alright on the ball but he doesn't want to defend', quips McIntosh angrily. 'Yeah, heard he's got a bad attitude Macca?' asks Hitchcock with a sharp turn of his head. 'Oh aye he has, so the Gaffer tells me. He couldn't tackle a fish supper, he's weak as piss!' The three laugh in together as the play gets underway again.

'How bad's this?' Townsend asks as we near half-time. I've lost count of the number of times I've checked my watch and rubbed my knees to try and warm myself up. 'Look at him! He's having an absolute nightmare!' shouts Morris as a midfield

player tries to turn and run back on the heavy playing surface, 'My missus would beat him in a race and let me tell you, she ain't quick!' The rear-guard laugh and nudge each other as the ball goes out of play for yet another throw-in.

After a spirited three minutes of stoppage time the half-time whistle blows, 0-0. The fans clap with the same enthusiasm that Townsend and I feel as we trudge up the steps and into the lounge, where there's a crinkled A4 sheet of paper stuck down with blue tack displaying: 'Scouts and Media', clinging to the door. Hitchcock, Morris, and McIntosh are already in there with their cups of tea and curled up cheese sandwiches. Townsend and I sit on a separate table. You can still hear the three old timers chatting away, 'How's the new bloke at your place? The new head of recruitment or whatever' asks Morris. 'Seems alright' replies Hitchcock, 'I've not met him yet, but he was alright with me on the phone'. 'You want to see if you can get more out of him than 40p a mile and a sausage roll on the way home' responds McIntosh, with a laugh and a mouthful of sandwich. Johnny comes and sits next to us, 'Alright guys?' I don't know his surname, just the club he works for. He's in his early 20s, wet behind the ears, carrying an iPad. 'What do you think of Dickinson?' he asks about the 18-year-old loanee. 'He's okay' replies Townsend, 'But he can't get into the game'. Johnny responds sharply, 'His stats are amazing, one of the best in the league for his attacking output'. You can almost feel people's eyes roll as they're sat around the table. 'How are things at your place Johnny?' asks Simon who's a recruitment analyst in his mid-30s. 'Not great. I'm working with a really boisterous manager' Johnny replies, lowering his head. 'I'm sat in with the coaches and everyone's got an opinion. It wasn't like this at my last club, it's incredibly stressful'. 'How did you get that job, Johnny?' asks Townsend. 'I just rang the chairman up, went in for a chat and he gave me the job. It's great, I love it' says Johnny, with an unconvincing smile, 'It doesn't feel like a job to me, it's an unhealthy obsession. I'm at this game tonight, one tomorrow and two at the weekend'. The conversation ends with some unenthusiastic nods of the head and an equally uninspired 'great' from Townsend.

I look round the room, there must be 40 scouts here. The majority sit hunched over their cups of tea and sandwiches. Two former players-turned-scouts stand by the door exchanging war stories. 'It's bloody crap this game' one of them says. I recognise his face but don't know the name, 'I'm getting off at 65 minutes'. The other, Gaz, replies 'I won't be far behind you, I'm at the training ground tomorrow then off up to Scotland on Thursday'. I feel a hand on my shoulder, it's Smogga. Mid-60s, former council worker, good, honest bloke. 'Hello young man' he says with a smile, we shake hands and exchange some scouting small talk, 'Going well your lot? What's the new gaffer like? How's Will getting on? Heard about Nigel?' He starts telling me all about his current role, like many on the job, it doesn't sound great. He continues, 'We still don't know our roles. On the day the new guy came in, he should have sat us down and said, 'your role's this, you do that' but that never happened. We still need that to happen because no one knows what they're meant to be doing'. I nod away and try and provide some reassurances, but I know it's the same story for a lot of us, 'I'm getting 25p a mile at the

moment and going to the same bloody grounds every week. It's ridiculous' he says with a frown. Over the old tannoy comes a crackled message, 'Please welcome the players back onto the pitch' and the Nowhere Men make their way onto the concourse and down the crumbling steps to their seats.

The temperature has dropped; the players look a bedraggled bunch as the referee gets the second half underway. The two former players, Gaz and his mate have come and sat just behind Townsend and me, cups in hand. They're chatting away, 'Listen Kingy, nothing ever really gets done with the players you flag up. It all gets lost in data, doesn't it?' says Gaz flippantly. 'You're right there Gaz. It's like when I signed Jimmy C., we had a load of reports saying he was no good with the ball and couldn't defend but I goes into the Gaffer and says, 'Listen, he can run, don't worry about that' and look at him now Gaz, it was a great signing'. Responds Kingy. Townsend nudges me and winks. 'That's your only currency, isn't it? saying 'I signed him', but we all know it's never just one person, it's the whole scouting team, the coaching staff, the sporting director or whoever' he says wryly, 'classic ex-player chat'. The next minute a heavy tackle flies in and both sets of players surround the referee. I look around, the scouts are on the edge of their seats, almost like fans, except Summers of course who's still on his phone. 'Ehh Gaz, I love it when a game gets tasty' Kingy says excitedly. All of a sudden, the game springs into life and there's goalmouth action, chances for both sides, bookings being handed out left right and centre. The emotion of the game is infectious and the Nowhere Men have started to take a real interest.

The game reaches the 77th minute and it's still 0-0. A fresh-faced lad steps off the bench and takes his tracksuit off, it's Gerry Jordan, the player Hitchcock has come to watch. I look over to the three old boys, they're already heading up the concrete steps to the exit. Hitchcock looks round at the pitch and sees Jordan ready to come on, 'Bloody typical' he says, throwing his arms in the air as he trudges up the steps. 'Don't worry Hitchy' says Morris calmly, 'You'll get a chance to watch him another time. It's late and you've got a long drive ahead of you'. The nameless scout on the other side of me looks me in the eye and smiles, 'Can you believe it? He's come all this way to watch one player and he's not even going to stick around to see him'. I smile and laugh in agreement. 'Chris Dennis by the way' and he says which team he works for, we exchange a few pleasantries, establish our mutual connections, which is serious currency in this game. 'I'm from an analysis background, me' he says with almost an embarrassed air, 'But scouting's a different ballgame altogether'. We both turn back to the action as the home side miss a guilt-edged chance at goal. 'I get no direction from the club really; I'm just here taking the game in and making as many notes as I can. I put my report up on the system, but I've got no idea if anyone reads it'. I nod sympathetically; I know that feeling. 'Here, can I get your number? I'll give you a bell sometime'. We exchange numbers, unaware of just how valuable that connection could be in the future.

'Here lad, are we getting off?' says Kingy behind. 'Too right, you said you'd be away by the 65th minute' replies Gaz with a snigger. The ball rolls out of play for a

throw-in. It's minute 81 now and there's a mass exodus. 'Nice to meet you, I'll give you a call' says Chris as he shakes my hand and jogs up the steps. Summers has gone too. There's only me, Townsend and young Johnny left. Johnny's tapping away on his iPad, oblivious to those pushing past him in a rush to get to their cars. 'He's naïve but credit to him he sticks around and does the job' says Townsend.

Minutes pass slowly as the players tire and the pitch worsens. I decide it's my time to go. There's nothing for me to see here but I never go before 87 minutes, it feels wrong to go any sooner. I make my way out as quickly as I can, past the stewards and those still busily working in the concourse and into the fine rain. As I hear a rambunctious response from the crowd following what I can only assume to be a heavy tackle or a poor refereeing decision, I bump into Harold, a scout for a Premier League club, smoking a cigarette on his way to his car. 'What did you think of Dickinson tonight?' He asks, I tell him my thoughts. 'I love him, me, I absolutely love him' he responds, expelling a plume of smoke into the cold night air, 'He's got everything, he's big, quick, strong, direct, mobile, sharp...' He carries on in this fashion for another minute or so, listing a plethora of synonyms for the word 'fast' before we part ways and he heads down a side street. 'I prefer parking here; you can get on the motorway quicker. Ta-ra mate'. I feel my phone vibrating, it's an unknown number, I answer, it's Chris Dennis. 'How bad was that? I couldn't take any more of that game' he says. 'How did it finish up?' I tell him I don't know; I've left early too. 'I've not got a clue why I was there mate; we've always looked at much better leagues and players than that, but this new fella's come in and he wants us to look at the lower leagues, it's bizarre'. Chris clearly wants to talk as I reach my car, open the door and jump in as quick as I can with my coat still on and put the heater on full blast. 'I've watched these teams for years, I watch them on video too, I know who the best players are but when I put them forward, I get a blank look or get told they're shit. The club's an embarrassment'. I'm getting another call, it's my boss, Warren. I need to take it; I apologise to Chris and tell him I'll call him back soon. Warren's on his way back from another game. 'Well, the game wasn't great, but it was competitive enough, Jennings did well, the Gaffer likes him, I think we might try and take him in January'. I don't really like Jennings personally, but I respond with something like, 'Okay, yeah, great'. I don't want to disagree with him really; he's the boss and what he says goes. 'Who did well at your game?' I tell him about Dickinson, the 18-year-old loanee. He replies coldly, 'Nah, don't like him unfortunately'. I try to change the subject onto players we both like or players I think he likes but he's fairly non-committal. 'Where are you on Saturday?' he asks. I tell him, my heart sinks as I utter the name of the clubs. Early in my career I would have felt excited about going to a game like that, but it's a long drive and I'm pretty confident there's no players of interest for us there. 'Should be a good game that, make sure you report on Potter' Warren replies sharply. Again, a player I've watched before who I don't think is good enough to be signed, 'No worries, will do' I mutter. 'Okay pal, I'll see you next week for that scout's meeting. Cheers mate, bye...bye' and hangs up.

THE END

Scout Report Two

Reflecting on 'Taking in a game', the story plays an important role in setting the scene of what it is like to be a scout, to be at a game. The reader meets several archetypes and is allowed the space to make their own conclusions. Whilst some crucial themes begin to emerge, they are relatively shallow and the upcoming song, '40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll' begins to delve more deeply into the role of the scout. Readers will notice that the theme continues from 'Taking in a game' almost to the point of repetition. For instance, scouts not having the opportunity to meet their line manager, scouts getting sacked by text and even in the title, the paltry remuneration of expenses and a snack on the way home. Therefore, this is the first evidence in this article where the findings go deeper rather than broader.

The use of songwriting is becoming more popular in the dissemination of qualitative research (Carless, 2018). Field and Carless (2011) in their 'Creative dissemination in sport research' contend that creative outputs such as songs can rework research findings into accessible, participatory forms. In the case of the song below, listeners or participants are encouraged to join in with the refrain and parts of the chorus (highlighted in bold). Such aspects invite the reader, or audience when performed, to contribute, inviting them to become part of the performance and thus drawn closer to the messages which the song hopes to impart e.g. Cargo and Mercer (2008), Bergold and Thomas (2012), Burns, Howard and Ospina (2021) and Lawlor and Palmer (2023b). The reader is therefore invited to engage in some of the frustration and angst which scouts feel as a result of their working conditions, something which is not as immediately apparent in the story, 'Taking in a game'.

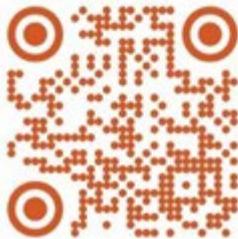
A crucial methodological approach in the crafting of this song was the use of the Voice-Centred Relational Method (VCRM), also known as The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003). This approach explores participants' inner worlds by attending closely to their voices, relationships, and contexts. A key technique is the creation of 'I-Poems', which extract first-person statements to highlight agency and emotional nuance, while 'We-Poems' extend this to collective identity and relational experience (McKenzie, 2021; Parsons, 2017; Jankowska, 2017). This method was particularly suited to exploring the lived experiences of football scouts, whose narratives often oscillate between isolation and a desire for community.

40P A MILE AND A SAUSAGE ROLL



At the QR Code below I sing '40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll', which is developed from field notes, observations and interviews refined into song

SCAN QR CODE



'40p A Mile and a Sausage Roll'.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DizVtpZcSjo&list=RDDizVtpZcSjo&start_radio=1

40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll

By Craig Lawlor

Em A G⁶ G

CHORUS/REFRAIN

*40p per mile and a sausage roll,
My data reveals my professional role,
Questions and motives, and identity,
The real outcomes of my Scout-ology!*

G C

*We're just a bunch of Nowhere Men finding players here and there,
When we see a talent,
we stop and stare*

9

*When they do something unique it really makes us smile, as long as we get our 40p a mile
It's not a science, we're not flying to the moon
But the manager,*

G C

*chief scout and I aren't singing the same tune,
When I stop and think about it, I don't really know my role
But at least I get expenses and a Sausage Roll*

VERSE 3:

40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll

Chorus/refrain (all):

***40p per mile and a sausage roll, my data reveals my professional role,
Questions and motives, and identity, the real outcomes of my... 'Scout-ology!'***

We're just a bunch of *Nowhere Men* finding players here and there
When we see a talent, we stop and stare
When they do something unique it really makes us smile
As long as we get our 40p a mile

It's not a science, we're not flying to the moon
But the manager, chief scout and I aren't singing the same tune
When I stop and think about it, I don't really know my role
But at least I get expenses and a sausage roll

I'm not sure what I'm doing here we have no philosophy
It feels like I'm paralysed by ambiguity
Did you hear about Bob? He got sacked by text
And now I'm wondering if I'll be next

I do it for the buzz – **Wow we've got someone!**
I watch players all day, but the job's never done
When football's good - **It's great, it's unbelievable!**
But all our targets are unrealistic and unachievable

Chorus/refrain (all):

***40p per mile and a sausage roll, my data reveals my professional role,
Questions and motives, and identity, the real outcomes of my... 'Scout-ology!'***

I'm growing tired and weary of going to these games all alone
I've never met my boss, but he seems nice on the phone
I don't know who I'm watching and what's worse I don't know why
But at least the club will pay for my butter pie

There's a player here today he's big, he's quick, he's strong
But my line manager and I don't get along
One day it might culminate in an ugly club wide fight
Cos I'm sick of watching Accrington every Tuesday night

Chorus/refrain (all):

***40p per mile and a sausage roll, my data reveals my professional role,
Questions, motives and identity, the real outcomes of my... 'Scout-ology!'***

I want it to go on for as long as it can - **I love it!**
But most days I feel like a hypocrite
Scouting is a privilege - **The best job in the world!**
This is what it's like being in the scouting world

If you're not sure about being a scout, you should get out now
All those ex-players are holier than thou
I spent years in the industry; I don't want to stand here and gloat
But for my hard work I got a Blackburn Rovers coat

Scout Report Three

The following creative episode is a translated version of the above song. This was a methodological device used to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the song '40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll'. There is a significant body of research supporting the use of translation to elicit deeper meaning from songs. Lowenthal (2014) in their 'Translating culture through song' found that song translation as a methodological device can probe how meaning shifts across linguistic and musical systems. This process of translation can reveal alternative conceptual metaphors and culturally specific resonances (Kaul, 2010) and as an interpretive act, can expose cultural meanings otherwise latent in source texts (Apter, 2006). In terms of the practicalities of crafting this song, I speak Spanish, but it is my second language, therefore my vocabulary is more limited. This meant that I had to deeply consider my language choices to stay true to the scouts' lifeworlds. This also presented the challenge of a change in the rhyming structure. It would not work simply translating the lyrics word for word. As Low, (2017) in their 'Translating songs: The theory of singability' states, song translation must negotiate semantic fidelity with performative and musical constraints to retain deeper meaning. This was a complex endeavour and certainly one that challenged me more than inputting a transcript into Nvivo and deciding which theme or 'node' a participant's response may sit under.



SONG

40 centavos por milla y
algunas tapas

Song: 40 Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas

Coro/Estribillo (todos):

40 centavos por milla y algunas tapas
Mis datos revelan muchas capas
Preguntas motivos e identidad
'Scout-ology' no tiene objetividad

Somos de ninguna parte y buscamos jugadores
Necesitamos que sean trabajadores,
Sonreímos cuando hacen un hechizo,
Siempre y cuando recibamos el chorizo

Pero no es una ciencia, no volamos a la luna,
El director y yo no tenemos una tribuna,
Cuando lo pienso, no se cuál es mi puesto,
Pero con mis gastos estoy dispuesto,

No entiendo mi puesto, pues no hay comunidad
Se siente estar paralizado por la ambigüedad
¿Conoces a Roberto? Fue despedido por excelente.
Ahora me pregunto si yo soy el siguiente.

Lo hago por entusiasmo

Tenemos alguien!

Trabajo por todo el día, pero nunca termino
Cuando el fútbol es bueno **es increíble**
Pero los jugadores son inalcanzables

Coro/Estribillo (todos):

40 centavos por milla y algunas tapas
Mis datos revelan muchas capas
Preguntas motivos e identidad
'Scout-ology' no tiene objetividad

Estoy harto de ir solo a los partidos,
No conozco a mi jefe, pero muy bueno me ha parecido,
Tal vez algún talento desaproveche
Pero el club me dará un café con leche

Hay un jugador aquí, es grande y fuerte,
Pero mi jefe y yo no tenemos mucha suerte,
De su idea posible me rebele
De no ver Leganés, cada sábado, en la tele.

Coro/Estribillo (todos):

40 centavos por milla y algunas tapas
Mis datos revelan muchas capas
Preguntas motivos e identidad
'Scout-ology' no tiene objetividad

No quiero que termine porque **me encanta**,
Pero tengo un nudo en la garganta
Ser scout es un privilegio - **el mejor camello!**
Así es como es estar en este mundo, lo más bello.

Si seguro no estás de ser scout, mejor tendrías que renunciar
Ningún ex-jugador te desea ayudar
Pasé unos años en la industria, y no me quiero regodear
Pero una chaqueta de Elche me quieren dar.



40 Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas
(40p A Mile and a Sausage Roll)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5kAMZVfnbM>

Invitación:

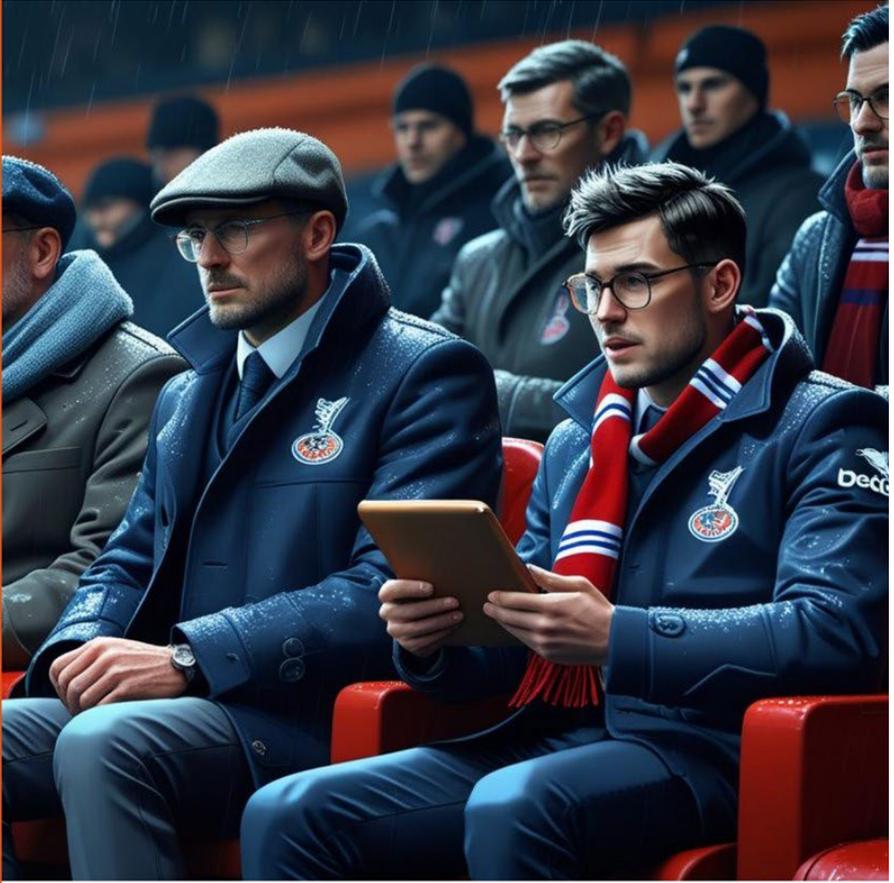
Si usted escanea y activa el código QR, cantaré mis datos por usted.

Canción: *Cuarenta Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas*

Scout Report Four

Translating and performing the Spanish version of my song was a challenging endeavour but one that reframed a lot of my thoughts and reflections about my 'data'. For instance, the majority of scouts referred to target players i.e. ones they would want to promote, recommend and sign, who produced moments of brilliance, they were uniquely talented. However, several scouts also discussed the importance of hard-work and a 'good' attitude. In my initial interpretations, I had focused on scouts searching for individual brilliance, 'something unique' which makes the scout smile. However, in this translated version, the lyrics and meaning shifted to scouts searching for 'trabajadores' or 'workers'. Similarly, in the refrain, rather than referencing the 'outcomes' of 'scout-ology', I now refer to the endeavour as 'not being grounded in objectivity', an important finding, and one which was beginning to emerge from the collection and interpretation of lived experiences.

This fed into the next section, 'Into the Unknown' where the reader is invited to meet 'Andy', a young scout finding his feet in the scouting game. Again, characters were composed through stories told in interviews, the tales of those met in the field as well as my own experiences, to evidence some of the tension and the darker side to the scouting game. When using narrative methods for human sciences, Riessman (2008) encourages storytelling to bring coherence to lived experiences, allowing researchers to refine raw data into analytic narratives. The motives were the same when crafting 'Taking in a game' however, rather than presenting my lived experience in the field, this story is told from the perspective of Andy. Conscious of the balance between 'I' and 'We', rather than showing my own reflections in a first-person story or song, this felt like the right time to remove myself from the presentation of lived experiences, away from the 'I' and to tell Andy's story.



STORY

Into the Unknown: A
Scout's Tale

Into the Unknown:

A Scout's Tale

Andy grew up like many young lads in the '90s. He loved football, he was a season ticket holder at his local club, he played grassroots every Saturday morning and most evenings he was glued to the hugely popular PC game 'Championship Manager' (Sports Interactive 1992-2016). On Sunday mornings, he would go to the local car boot and buy World Cup reruns from the 70s and 80s on VHS and would rush home to watch, pause and rewind them, studying every moment of brilliance, well-timed tackle and penalty kick. He dreamed of being a player, at any level in any position, he loved defending, scoring goals and even played in goal for a few years. He loved being part of a team, winning and losing together, the bonds formed through working together towards a common goal. If he couldn't have a career playing football, the next best thing would be to earn a living watching it and one day, around the age of 15, he met a scout, an old acquaintance of his dad. Andy thought this guy had a sort of mythical aura about him; he'd worked in the Premier League and Andy had the chance to ask him what it was like. He recounted tales of the great players he'd signed and the even better ones that got away. Whilst Andy didn't really understand this magical world of scouting, he was fascinated and the idea of being a scout was firmly planted.

When it came to decision time, post school and college, Andy was at a loss of what to do. His parents, teachers and friends pushed him towards certain careers and university degrees – Business, Journalism, Conveyancing but Andy still craved football, it had been the constant in his life. He became dissatisfied at just being a bedroom football fanatic and started coaching a local school team, at first as a volunteer before opting to study Sports Coaching at university, even though he'd never thought university was for him. He was excited at the prospect, nervous to move away from home, but ready to commit to something meaningful, a project, something he'd chosen himself, not something someone else had picked for him. Scouting wasn't a feature on the degree, it was seen as an old boy's club, a mysterious world that someone like Andy could never learn about let alone enter. He thought back to the scout he met when he was 15 – he certainly wasn't an academic and the university course was very clearly sold as the academic study of coaching.

Midway through his first year of study, Andy got the opportunity to volunteer as a performance analyst with a Premier League Academy. It was his first taste of professional football. Andy threw himself into it, hours and hours of unpaid work but it didn't matter, he was on the path he'd dreamt of since he was a boy as he stepped out on muddy park pitches, cheered on the terraces and watched and rewatched Gazza's goal against Scotland at Euro '96.

New opportunities beckoned, as did the chance to collaborate with other like-minded people, and Andy said yes to everything that came his way – a year with a Premier League first team, a paid internship with a Premier League Academy before his first full-time role as performance analyst at Grimshaw Athletic FC. The stakes were high, the role was not well paid, and he was embarking on a career in a fiercely competitive and precarious industry, or at least this is what friends and family told him, but he was now in the inner sanctum and saw what it was like behind the curtain. Things

started to move quickly. He was soon working with the club's first team and began to meet some of the club's scouts.

One afternoon Baz, an experienced coach who had been closely watching Andy's progress at the club informed him there was a player that needed scouting. He thought Andy was up to the job. 'You've got good eyes and ears, you know what you're doing'. The player in question was the club's Under 21s' goalkeeper, Zac, who was on loan at a local non-league club. 'Will you go on Saturday, do a report, and feed back to us on Monday morning?'. Andy hesitated. This was what he'd always dreamed of, but could he really become a scout, even if just for the day? He agreed. He was excited and wanted to impress.

Saturday came and Andy arrived at the game early. He had his notebook and pens at the ready. He felt pride as he arrived at the ticket office and saw an envelope on the desk with his name on it containing his complimentary ticket for the game. As he walked onto the terrace he got a few funny looks, the locals asking each other 'Who's that? What's he here for? Must be a scout' Zac had an exceptional game, keeping a clean sheet and pulling off some match-winning saves. Andy scribbled relentlessly, keeping his eyes peeled and ear to the ground for the full game. As the final whistle blew, he headed for the exit and got in his car, proud of what he had accomplished and ready to share his thoughts on Monday morning.

Monday came. The manager and coaches were sat in the room waiting... waiting to hear what Andy had to say about Zac's performance. Andy was anxious to get it right – he didn't want any conflict with 'The Gaffer', Baz and the other coaches. He wanted to try to stay objective while still getting his opinion across. His voice was weak to start with, but he grew in confidence and provided a thorough assessment.

'He did really well even up until the 94th minute when...'

'Hang on' interrupted Baz... Andy was nervous about what was to follow, 'Did you say the 94th minute?' Andy nodded. 'That's a proper scout for you, staying 'til the end!' said Baz. Andy breathed a sigh of relief. He'd completed his first scouting assignment and passed the test.

Things progressed quickly over the coming months. Andy started watching more and more games, studying and making notes on players and in doing so began to fall out of love with his gruelling performance analysis role: the long journeys on the team bus, the nights on the gantry, overnight stays in Premier Inns. He felt the calling of something bigger. He decided he wanted to leave the performance analysis 'game', to expand his knowledge and study a Master's degree, again in Sports Coaching even if it meant taking a job outside of football for a while. Baz came to talk to him; sitting in the dressing room at the training ground he asked Andy, 'Are you sure this is what you want? It's a big call. I know there's no progression for you here but are you sure you want out?' Andy nodded. 'Well look, I've spoken to The Gaffer. We want to keep you on as a scout. Nothing too demanding to start with – we've got no one covering players in the non-league and you'd be perfect. We've agreed that you'll get your expenses to start with – 40p a mile. What do you reckon?'. Andy was thrilled. This was a huge moment, a chance to properly step into the scouting world. 'Have a think about it' said Baz calmly, 'it isn't for everyone.'

Whilst doubtful of his scouting credentials, Andy gladly accepted the role and started going to games, one or two a week, normally picked for him by the chief scout but he soon was given the autonomy to choose his own games. Andy was not only diligent, but he was also pretty adept at finding gems. He'd take copious notes at games, and he'd built a database, ranking the players from best to worst by position. Andy was loving it; this is what he'd always dreamed of. At scout meetings, the rest of the scouting team and staff listened to his opinions and before long Andy was being asked to travel far and wide, scouting professional games including monitoring some of the best young talent in world football. Andy was becoming a familiar face on the scouting circuit, and he was surprised by how many people he already knew, including Carlos, an old university acquaintance who had been in the game a few years longer. As Andy became more immersed in the field, his network steadily expanded. He began to adopt a more professional appearance, dressing smartly, carrying a sleek notebook and pen, and using the proper scouting terminology. A pivotal moment came when he met Derek, a seasoned scout who recognised Andy's potential and took an interest in his development.

Derek started to take Andy under his wing, inviting him over to his house on International Breaks, when there were no domestic games of interest to scout, to have a look at his reporting system. 'My challenge to you Andy is to try and report on every player, two or three lines. If you can do that, you're well on your way.' Derek's reports were simple, concise, to the point and he wasn't afraid to put his neck on the line. He was also succinct and direct when offering words of warning to Andy about the scouting world 'Listen son, this life's not for everyone. You'll get some people ploughing their own furrow and it's a demanding role but trust me, you'll soon know whether it's for you or not'. Andy was grateful for Derek's advice, and his guidance had given him confidence and some invaluable industry insights to go out and thrive in the field.

Andy worked diligently for the club for a couple of years alongside his master's and a full-time job. He was following Derek's advice and getting better all the time. It wasn't long before he was getting job offers from other clubs. As he'd progressed, observed, and learnt more about the industry, he realised there wasn't much of a scouting process at Grimshaw Athletic and the players they'd signed were, at best, hit and miss. After some instability following three managerial changes in quick succession, Andy increasingly felt that his chapter at the club was coming to a close. Besides, he felt his knowledge and skills had advanced beyond Grimshaw Athletic. He had met with key contacts at other clubs about potential roles, but he felt conflicted, he worked well with the scouting team at Grimshaw, and they'd believed in him right from the start, Baz in particular, so he wasn't going to jump unless the right thing came along...

One day Andy got a call from Carlos. He was going in at Southbank Dynamo as Scout Coordinator, he wanted Andy. A progressive club, heavily data informed in their decisions, but they wanted boots on the ground and Carlos saw Andy as a good fit. Although Southbank was 200 miles away from Andy, they needed someone to cover the north of England. Andy, with some regret called the chief scout at Grimshaw Athletic and said that his time was up, he rang Baz too, who had since lost his job at Grimshaw, full of positivity he said to Andy 'It's a great club mate and a really good move for you – go for it!'

Andy made the leap. Carlos wanted him and had agreed it with the sporting director and head of scouting. Andy was thrilled but Carlos warned him of the task at hand, 'It's an important job, we need people we can trust who are out at games all the time but also can fit in video games too – Yan, one of our scouts watches 3 video games a day'. Andy felt challenged but full of enthusiasm, the project sounded exciting, the money was good too - £40 per live game and £25 for a video game. The more you did, the more you learned and the more you earned. But Carlos was always quick to challenge 'There's none of this just report on the one or two you like; we need a few lines on every player'. Andy was ready, Derek had prepared him well and there was no turning back now. He had gone from a game or two a week at Grimshaw Athletic to 30 video games and 12 live games a month, Andy was part of something and properly immersed in the scouting world.

At first it was a struggle, Carlos had Andy out at 4 games a week at times and trying to balance this alongside a full-time job was difficult. It wasn't just that, Carlos would question Andy directly on players, 'He's not for me - you're the only one of the scouting team who likes him you know?' Andy hadn't encountered this before and struggled at times to deal with conflicts of opinion and the challenges Carlos presented.

But Andy grew into the role and had two successful years at Southbank Dynamo, helping to sign players who went on to earn the club millions and making their Premier League and international debuts in the process. This list of success stories grew to include Zac, the goalkeeper who Andy had completed his first scouting report on. Carlos was initially sceptical when Andy put his name forward and for a few weeks, he would message him every time Zac made an error 'Just watched the highlights of Grimshaw's game at the weekend, another howler from Zac'. But eventually Andy's positive reports won Carlos and the rest of the team over, and Zac signed for Southbank Dynamo and proved to be a real success, playing for his country before earning a big money move to one of the biggest clubs in the world.

Andy was proud of his hard work and the success that came with it but anytime Andy felt comfortable and in danger of becoming complacent, Carlos would appear – a meeting, a call, a WhatsApp message late at night:

'This morning, I watched your game from Saturday, you gave the centre forward a 3, I've given him a 2.'

'I know you like him but why? I'm watching him now and he's getting bullied. I don't like him, and the head coach doesn't either'.

Andy was always put on edge when Carlos would say something like this, questioning whether or not he was up to the challenge, but he realised that it was just the club's, and Carlos' way of testing him and trying to improve his scouting. Andy felt challenged but looking back, he saw how much he improved over the two years. He felt content at Southbank Dynamo until one day, when the clear view ahead was obscured with rather stormy skies.

In a chance meeting, Andy sat down with Eamon 'The Eel', Head of Recruitment at Westmoor Albion FC, a team local to Andy, in the same league as Southbank Dynamo. Eamon had a reputation in the industry, a driven, duplicitous customer 'with a face like a Wellington Boot', as one agent put it. After some chat about players in

their league and ideas about scouting, Eamon directly asked, 'How happy are you with Southbank Dynamo?', Andy hesitated before saying 'Well, yeah, I am happy. But it's just like any other scouting job really'. Andy wasn't being totally honest, he loved it at Southbank, but he was curious to hear what Eamon had to say. 'How would you like to come and work with me at Westmoor Albion? You can lead your own department as Head of Technical Scouting'. Andy couldn't believe it; he nearly blurted out 'YES' immediately but held his tongue. In the end he was positive without committing to anything. 'I'll be in touch, it would be great to work with you and besides I hate the Dynamo, I'd love to steal one of their scouts!' Eamon walked out and disappeared. Andy heard nothing for weeks. Maybe this was a blessing, he'd always been surrounded by people he knew and trusted but this was a step into the unknown. He continued with diligence at Southbank Dynamo, but Andy felt things were changing. The hierarchy had altered, and Carlos was being sidelined. All of sudden Andy felt at a crossroads.

Several weeks later Eamon got in touch. He'd spoken to the chairman (known in the game as Whispers) at Westmoor Albion and they'd agreed to offer Andy the role part-time. The pay was low, but Eamon sold the idea – the creation of a data informed scouting system, with line management responsibilities. It gave Andy the chance to implement all he'd learnt from Derek, Carlos and his time at Southbank Dynamo. It was too good to turn down. Andy worked his notice before joining Westmoor Albion, he was ready for a new challenge but felt a pang of sadness as he walked away from Southbank Dynamo. He went with Carlos' blessing and a customary word of warning, 'Don't try to walk before you can run over there, it's very different club to the Dynamo, you know'.

Things started well at Westmoor. Andy was building his team, growing the department to mirror and one day emulate the 'gold standard' he'd seen at Southbank Dynamo. He recruited a young, up and coming scout named Harry, who he'd met on the scouting circuit, he was a good foil for Andy. Together, they started to unearth some lower league gems and lifted the department at Westmoor to a level they'd not known before. But Andy was never sure of Eamon's motives. Sometimes he loved the players Andy and his team put forward, other times he dismissed them instantly, on some occasions he wouldn't even answer the phone. 12 months passed; Andy was still enjoying the role, but Westmoor Albion hadn't signed a single player. 'Don't worry pal, we're still getting paid to watch footy, beats the day job, for me anyway!' Harry would say and it reminded Andy of why he got into the scouting game in the first place.

Just over a year into the job, Andy's team found a real gem in Xander Hansen. He was a tall, quick, talented striker playing abroad, still young, but had experience in England and he'd been forgotten about. Andy put together a highlights video with a data package and sent it to Eamon. As usual, it was an effort to convince the Head of Recruitment to even watch the video but eventually he did and he immediately contacted Andy, 'I can see why you're excited by him' he said, 'I'll present him to The Gaffer tomorrow'. Westmoor Albion went on to sign Hansen for over £1,000,000. Andy and his team were thrilled. The morning after Hansen's signing was announced, Andy went online to see what was being said about Albion's new signing and was dismayed to hear the noises coming out of the club. 'Eamon identified Hansen, he takes the lead on all scouting at the club'. This was the first time Andy had felt like this, he and his team had put in months of hard work, and it felt like they had nothing to show

for it. Eamon even dug out some of the earliest reports Andy and his team had produced on Hansen which weren't overly favourable. 'Good job I decided to ignore your reports!' quipped Eamon. Andy saw for the first time what he considered the dark underbelly of the scouting world. Andy turned to Derek for advice, 'That's the game, sometimes my mate, everyone wants the recognition when things are going well. You'll always be on the periphery of things if you're part-time, but you've done your job - it's a great signing too by the way, you can be proud of yourself! Stick at it.'

Soon after, Eamon left Westmoor Albion for a prestigious role at a bigger club, although Andy didn't hear this from Eamon. He heard it from Whispers, the Westmoor Albion chairman, who rang Andy to tell him the news and invite him in for a meeting at the training ground about 'the way forward'. On his way to the meeting, Andy got a call from Eamon 'The job's yours if you want it, I've told Whispers you're the lynchpin in all of this but if I were you, I wouldn't take it.' Eamon told Andy a few horror stories about the club and referred to Whispers as a 'Master Manipulator'. Andy was on edge and tense ahead of the meeting.

In reality Andy found Whispers quite affable. He was a stout man who sat on a swivel chair behind a huge desk. He looked an imposing figure. Whispers said all the right things and enticed Andy in. He offered Andy the role of head of scouting, part-time but on slightly more money. Andy was delighted and, on the way home called Carlos looking for some advice. 'Whispers is a slippery character you know, watch yourself.' He spoke to Derek too who was much more upbeat 'It's no more than you deserve pal, have a think about if it works for you but if it does, go for it.'

It worked for Andy, and it worked well – he took the job and soon built up a strong relationship with the manager and coaching staff and even felt like he had Whispers onside, although the chairman's support for Andy waxed and waned. Andy swiftly implemented his own system, erasing all trace of Eamon's flawed process and during that January Transfer Window, Westmoor Albion were the busiest club in the country in terms of new signings, all led by Andy and his team. Andy felt exhausted at the end of the window but full of pride for what he and his team had achieved. They'd passed some gruelling tests, convincing the manager, Whispers and even the players' agents in some cases as 8 new faces piled through the door and into the Westmoor squad. What would 10-year-old Andy have thought of all of this?

Eamon was still in touch, telling Andy how great his new role was and seemingly warning him about potential threats, 'Don't listen to a word Whispers says! He's speaking to people all the time about your job – he's looking to replace you! He says one thing then does another. Like I always say, he's the Master Manipulator'. Andy queried Eamon's intentions. He felt uneasy and was fearful of being displaced but tried to focus on the job at hand, finding players for the team. He found it hard to block it out and started to question everything the 'Master Manipulator' said.

One day Andy was called in by Whispers for a 'Department Review'. Andy feared the worst, maybe Eamon was telling the truth all along. 'Do you think we'd benefit from a Recruitment Analyst? Someone who's here all the time, analysing data and footage, supporting you in the job?' asked Whispers. Andy was relieved and agreed – he could keep his role part-time and choose an ally to support him in his work. 'Good' said Whispers, 'Because I've got someone for you. He's going to come in for an

interview on Friday. We can meet him and get a feel for him then. I've had Will Dane on the phone telling me how good he is'. Andy felt uneasy about the process, he'd rather things were done in a more formal way with an official job advert, application and interview process. But he felt assured by the way Whispers had delivered the proposition, so Andy didn't question it; he was the guy responsible for running the club after all.

When Andy arrived on Friday, he was greeted by the news that Whispers had already offered Gideon Snyder, the unknown recruitment analyst, the job. 'I met with Gideon already. He came in on Wednesday and I loved everything about him, and you will too.' Whispers proclaimed, 'He starts next week; you can meet him at our game on Tuesday night.' Andy tried to stay positive, but he felt anxious, like how he'd felt the day the club signed Hansen, and he got no recognition – was this Gideon Snyder an ally or a rival? Either way, he put on a smile and got ready to meet the Snyder at Westmor Albion's game on Tuesday.

On the way to the game, Andy called Harry, 'Who knows what Whispers will do next! Doesn't matter anyway pal – this new bloke won't be better than Chief Andy of Westmor Albion FC!' Harry always kept things light, and they laughed together as Andy exited his car and headed to the bright lights of the stadium. Walking across the car park Andy marked the faces of the Westmor fans. They looked at him inquisitively. Andy was smartly dressed and thought to himself, 'All I've done for this football club, and the fans don't even know who I am!' He picked up his ticket from reception and headed to the Director's Box.

His first meeting with Snyder was immediately confrontational, Snyder questioning Andy's methods, challenging his views, and undermining his experience. Snyder was lightning quick and had a response for everything, it was like he'd been preparing for this moment his whole life. Well-dressed and articulate Snyder asked 'Why do you like going to games so much? Why can't you just watch them on video? Where does data sit in the process?' He was prickly and ruthless when referring to some of the club's current playing staff, even Hansen. He continued to probe and challenge Andy's views, 'But why? Tell me why that's important'. It wasn't curiosity, it was interrogation. He dismissed the value of what Andy had created, pushed for his own methods, and treated the conversation like a battle. Andy came away feeling dazed and crestfallen, like he'd failed an important test.

Later that week the club's website proclaimed Snyder's arrival with fanfare. Andy's name wasn't mentioned. And when he thought about it, he realised his own arrival had never been announced. This was a time of transition at the club, the manager had walked away, and a new head coach had been appointed. It felt like Whispers was trying to seize more control of scouting operations since the resignation of Eamon. Andy rang Derek for some support 'You've just got to stick at it, keep getting out to games and drown them in data'. Andy puffed his chest out and got ready for the ordeal.

One of Snyder's first actions was to dismantle the scouting database Andy had built during his time at the club. Andy was dismayed. 'We don't need this,' Snyder said, 'I've told Whispers I can build something better, for free. I've convinced the board, which wasn't hard because it's going to save the club money.' And just like that, all Andy's reports and those of his team were gone overnight. Snyder replaced it with

a reporting system he controlled entirely, and scouts' written reports were filtered, ignored, or deleted. Andy and his team had been sidelined; the scouts were told under no uncertain terms by Whispers that they had to fall in line with what Gideon said. Andy felt like he'd lost his team, his tools, and his voice. He felt he was on a hiding to nothing.

Andy had a decision to make. He never usually liked to question, challenge and engage in conflict but clearly Snyder was being supported, and he was being pushed aside. He decided to raise his concerns with Whispers and whilst he was critical of Snyder's brashness, he brushed them off. 'You both report to me so as long as you're out at games and passing me names of players who will make us better then everything's fine. You'll have to find a way of working together.' he said. Things felt ambiguous but the power imbalance was clear - Snyder was full-time and Andy was part-time. Snyder was being positioned as the future, and Andy felt that he was being erased. He feared his time at Westmoor Albion, and maybe his time as a scout, was coming to an end. He had some tough choices to make, should he hold on, try to adapt and keep trying to do the right thing? Or should he go into conflict with Snyder, try and beat him at his own game? Andy felt like he had nowhere to turn, every time he entered the club's training ground, decisions had been made without him and Snyder, who had started to refer to Andy as 'one of his scouts', was requesting that Andy and the rest of the team would watch players they'd reported on many times before, but these reports no longer existed. Snyder's arrogance was staggering. In meetings, he'd fold his arms and say things like, 'Unfortunately, I don't like that player,' as if that was the end of the discussion. His word was final. The players signed were a disaster, the only success came from the head coach's gut decision on a player he'd seen previously, bypassing the broken process entirely.

Andy tried to outthink, outflank, outmanoeuvre Snyder, trying to guess what he would do next, but he always seemed to be one step ahead. He even went to the scouting team in a last-ditch attempt to claw back what he once had: 'Ignore what Gideon tells you, he's bad news. Let me know the players you like, and I'll feed them into Whispers, like we did with Hansen in the good old days.' Andy's heart sank when he received negative responses from the scouting team, even Harry was reluctant 'Look Andy, you know I've got a lot of respect for you, but Whispers has told me we need to follow Gideon's methods, even if he is a bit of a balloon. Keep your chin up mate, it's only football after all.' Andy tried to stay upbeat, but he felt alone, like a ghost in a place he once called home. He maintained his diligence, analysing players' data, building his databases and getting out to games but found himself alone on the terraces with a feeling of displacement. Agents would call, those who he had struck deals with only months before, asking for insights on players they represented, Andy had nothing to offer. He had no authority, no reports, no influence, no allies. He started to see how fragile the system was. How much it depended on people, on collaboration, trust, a shared purpose. When that was gone, everything collapsed.

It became too much, and Andy withdrew. He stopped attending meetings. He blocked Snyder's number. He even stopped going to games, the one thing that had filled him with passion and pride in the first place, that had always given his life meaning. Football had been a constant in his life but the darkness he had seen in the industry now cast profound shadows and permeated his everyday existence. The anxiety, ambiguity

and conflict kept Andy awake at night. He turned things over in his mind, how he could subdue and win against Snyder? Could he convince Whispers to go back to how things were? He thought back to the advice of Baz, Carlos and Derek. Andy was more unsure than ever, was this world for him? Was he ever really cut out to be a scout? If you had to behave like Gideon Snyder and Eamon to survive in the industry, Andy wasn't sure he wanted to be a part of it anymore. His love for football had been dismantled, diminished, and the passion that it once ignited in him had all but gone.

A few months later after a poor run of form, Whispers sacked the head coach and a new manager came in, a strong and boisterous character. On his first day, he took over Snyder's office. That said everything. Snyder's personal project, the system he had built, the control he had seized, was over. Within a year of Snyder's arrival, he was dismissed. Quietly. No fanfare this time. By then, Andy had already resigned. He spoke to Baz, Derek, even Carlos who all questioned his decision – 'I thought you weren't going to do that! Someone like you can't be out of the game!' said Derek, exasperated, but it was too late.

On the day Andy informed Whispers of his intentions, he said, 'Well you've got two options. You can work your notice period, or you can fuck off today.' A sentiment far removed from the early days where he was told he was the scouting 'lynchpin' at Westmoor Albion. Andy chose the latter. The two shook hands. 'Thanks for leaving on good terms, not like Eamon.' said Whispers. If that was good, Andy dreaded to think what bad looked like. Andy rang the individual members of the scouting team to tell them the news, 'Classic Whispers!' said Harry 'I guess that's us lot gone then too. Ah well, it's been a good ride mate, thanks for the opportunity. Guess I'll just go back to my boring day job.'

As Andy walked away, he thanked Gideon Snyder for 'everything'. Not for his support, he gave none, but for showing Andy the truth. For revealing the darker side of the industry, the darker side of himself. How passion, purpose, meaning, the desire to transcend, to develop and lead the best scouting department possible forced them to collide, turning conversations about football, with all its joys, into a battleground. Andy's journey, which started as a journey of the heart, to become a scout and be a part of the scouting world had come to an end, for the time being at least, to pursue a journey of a higher purpose.

Andy has since made the return to the ordinary world, returning to the terraces of his local club and watching football for enjoyment again but Eamon, Whispers and Snyder lit a fire within him, to tell his story, not just for himself but for every scout who's been silenced, sidelined or forgotten. This experience didn't just change his career; it changed his life. It gave Andy a mission: to give voice to the voiceless, to expose the realities behind the scouting game. He might return to the scouting world in the future, but it will be on his terms where he might accept and deal with conflict as well as his own darkness, his shadow within and in the knowledge that scouting is not just about data, process and strategy – it's about people.

THE END

Scout Report Five

'Into the Unknown' begins to shed some light on the dark underbelly of football scouting and working in the industry in general. Notions of 'the job' as opportunity (or being grateful for one), or 'doing a good job' for others, rise to the surface throughout this story (see appendix 1 - The Football Scout's Job Description). Then more fresh topics emerge in the form of conflict, a tussle for the limelight, ambiguity and fierce competition between key stakeholders. Reflecting upon the earlier creative pieces, these themes were present e.g. "I've never met him, but he seems nice on the phone" or "those ex-players are holier than thou" but never were they made explicit. This is a prime example of the value of deeper immersion, reflection and refining of data. Hypothetically, I wonder if these phenomena would have shown themselves through further data collection, I doubt they would have. It was only through the consideration of Rolfe et al.'s (2001) critical theoretical lens of 'what', 'so what', and 'now what' that these phenomena began to emerge, to truly begin to capture the meaning of the scout's lived experience rather than reaching a conclusion too hastily or slovenly, a concept named bridling by Dahlberg et al. (2008).

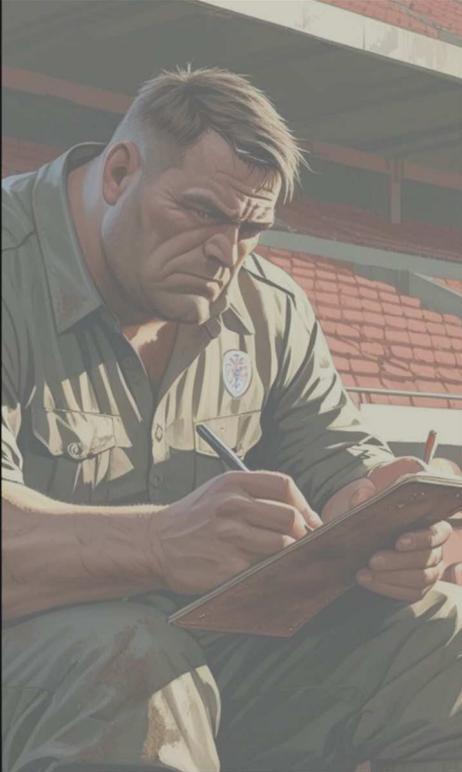
Most aptly, Andy's story now feeds into the next character called The Corporal whose story is told in the poem 'The Game Doesn't Care'. Andy undoubtedly was filled with passion and enthusiasm for football and scouting but began to feel this dissipate. The Corporal's story is somewhat bleaker, and it leaves the reader wondering if he ever felt the fire of passion for scouting. This poem was built through guidance from Arthur Frank and his Chaos Narrative, one which resists plot and closure; it is raw experience refusing tidy moral order (Frank, 1995). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) say in their 'Writing as a method of inquiry: Poetic representation' that poetic and creative nonfiction forms can yield a complexity and richness that conventional prose flattens. Similarly, Sparkes and Smith (2014) state that creative forms such as poetry allow sport researchers to represent embodied and affective dimensions. The upcoming poem is composed entirely from The Corporal's responses in interviews, both semi-structured and unstructured during conversations in the field. Using methods from creative nonfiction research, the order of The Corporal's responses have been modified to take the reader on a journey. Therefore, while the poem tells a somewhat 'fictional' story in the sense that this specific monologue never took place, it is entirely factual in content (Berry, 2011).



POEM

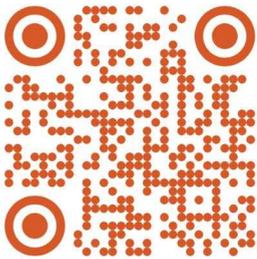
The Game Doesn't Care

THE GAME DOESN'T CARE



At the QR Code below I read 'The Game Doesn't Care', which is developed from field notes, observations and interviews refined into poetry

SCAN QR CODE



The Game Doesn't Care

We're all prisoners of our own experience.
I was sort of,
a failed player,
and you don't know what else to do.

The game failed me.
I was a player,
'he could have been a lot better', had he had good coaching,
had he had a better childhood.

I experienced play, in a negative sense,
getting disillusioned, with playing.
And you think, 'Scouting is the way I can influence',
I can get into the game.

And then you start analysing, the game.
I've got all these threads, that I've not really followed through,
I've never committed,
not all the way.

Initially, I was watching players, just once, in isolation.
It was an exercise in trust, in me.
The decision making had already taken place. But, I got better. And now,
I can make a high-confidence judgement on a player in just 10 minutes.

What am I doing? I'm just watching, people, all the time.
I'm observing, people, all the time.
I'm diagnosing, all the time.
I'm reporting, all the time.

No one really, actually, supervises.
No one, educates. Nowhere for us to go and get education.
Outside of governing bodies, independence, and then,
own learning through literature.

A scout essentially constructs their own learning,
relies upon their own experience,
presumes,
is arrogant or confident enough to believe that that's sufficient.

So, we've not defined it.
We've not defined what actually makes a scout.
So, it's just subjectivity.
There's no pedagogy involved.

There's no pathway involved.
One governing body, the recognised one, has tried,
has recognised, there's a need,
a need for education.

But how qualified are they to talk about club football recruitment?
We don't believe they are,
all of their recruitment, is essentially, done for them.
So, HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY TELL US?

So, a scout, the skills of a scout,
it's not been defined. It was never defined.
It's not a meritocracy, I might be Diego's mate.
but I'm here on merit.

The others, the ex-players, the chameleons, and their cronies,
They're not, they're on borrowed time.
Someone just says, 'I like you as a person', 'I think you know football'.
Go and do some reports for us'. And they let you run with it.

But no one really gives you any education.
Keith gave me an opportunity to report on players,
probably because he didn't have much of a budget,
probably because good help's hard to find (I find that, myself)

Keith said to me, 'Most people, most scouts, are alright, mate'
But they aren't.
The Steeles of this world, the Kingys?
It's a world of turds.

We trust, but we never verify.
It's subjective.
It's not verifiable.
All of it's subjective to operator error. There's no other known way.

From the start,
the known way has been:
'Scout goes to games, reports on - observes,
X number of players'.

Absent conversations.
It's just been: 'Go and find us some good players'.
'We need a right back',
'go and find us a right back'.

But then where does bias come in?
What is knowledge?
How much can the human mind or eye actually take?
How much can a human brain actually process and restore?

So HOW ON EARTH CAN A HUMAN POSSIBLY PROCESS ALL OF THIS INFORMATION?

So again, we're moving from there, aren't we?
To the future, which is much more analytics,
much more data-led,
much more about algorithms and patterns.

Saying, 'Actually, we need to take the human element out, of this,
as much as possible,
because we feel it's unsafe'.
Clubs are finding now that's not safe, anymore.

There're flaws, in both humans, and data.
Like at South Gale City, we had 11 software platforms
but none of it mattered. We didn't talk.
That's kind of where I see the dilemma right now.

Collaboration is a nice idea,
but it's alien in the industry.
You can change the names, the clubs, but it's all the same.
IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME.

They bring in an all-knowing manager who's given all the power and just causes
havoc.
So, there's a massive disconnect which leads to ambiguity.
Ambiguity. A lack of specificity.
Absurdity. No clarity.

Often the worst clubs, sorry, the least effective clubs, are scattergun at best,
reactive, goes to the wire, hair on fire,
that's what I've found.
That's not me ... I plan.

You might do hundreds of reports,
go to hundreds of games,
but the manager comes in:
'No, we don't want him, we want him instead'.

I recommend Joe Field.
He isn't cheap enough. When he's free???!
Then we go and try and buy him for £500,000.
Where's the sense in that?

It's the same old story:
'We've got this player in mind'.
'Well, how much?'
'Could we go over £450 a week?'
'Yeah, for the right player.'
'But what's the right player?'
'Well, I don't know'.

It shows you, of course, the nature of it, how misaligned it can be, how messy it can be.
They don't give a shit about us scouts, clearly,
We don't receive any feedback, and when it's like that,
it's easy for me to be detached. Emotionally, physically, geographically.

It's just a case of 'Thanks for those names' ...
I have no voice. I don't have a choice.
Relative success shouldn't be that hard to achieve.
Sadly, in my experience, that hasn't happened, or has been fleeting.

At Pyesholt Town, and then at South Gale City, and then day one at Blue United.
Role ambiguity, no role clarity.
I had to ask...
'WHY ON EARTH AM I BEING MICROMANAGED?'

It took him more effort to micromanage me, and he couldn't even do that appropriately.
I just asked,
'WHY CAN'T I JUST GET ON WITH THE JOB?'

I was watching two games a day
I could have just sat there, done it and taken the money,
But I was watching other players as well,
off my own back.

They'd send me a list of players - they would all be shit, it was a waste of time.
So, they send me a shit player to watch,
from an Eagles FC game, and all I see is a 22-year-old Brazilian, Alexis.
He was a monster. His performance had meaning.

I smiled. He created things I hadn't seen before.
I admired him.
I coveted him.
I recommended him.

It got no traction whatsoever.
Jimmy and Dave couldn't be arsed and wouldn't entertain the idea.
Now he's scoring in the top league in Belgium.
They can't see. They don't see, what I see.

Instead, they spent over £2,000,000 on a full back,
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
Spending money like that on a FUCKING RIGHT BACK?
But that's the industry, isn't it? No one burns money like football.

Jimmy one day asked,
'Don't take this the wrong way, but are you sure football is the right industry
for you?'
They didn't understand, my anger, my frustrations,
I asked, WHY AM I BEING MICROMANAGED?

They accused me of being unprofessional, and confrontational.
'I want autonomy'.
They don't want you to have autonomy, they can't explain why.
I never had any autonomy,
I DON'T KNOW WHY?
because they can't tell you why.
They want the authoritarian, archaic, hierarchical, bullshit of football because that's
the factory they're from, isn't it?

We've just got different schools of thought, completely, that's the thing.
I haven't been able to overcome these barriers,
but I continue to do the job,
regardless.

As I was paid by, and employed by, the football club. It's demoralising.
What else would those guys do?
The ones who are trapped, by relying on being an ex-player, getting jobs from ex-
players who don't reflect or try to get better,
like me.

Their ego couldn't handle it, working in Marks and Spencer's,
so, what can they do? They can't get out.
They reach this zenith of their career as a player and there's an end point:
What are you going to go and do now?

Because the game's not going to tell you.
The game's not going to tell you anything other than the game,
and there's only a finite number of jobs left in the game,
and you don't want to do, or can't do anything else.

I've never thought of scouting as enjoyable.
I wanted to be a scout because
I never got the chance to be a player.
And now, I'm just SICK of going to League 1 and League 2 games, every week,

It's so demoralising, it's dumb.
There's F*** ALL there for us. I don't want to do those games, anymore,
I just think 'Let's, let's go non-domestic', but I don't have a choice if Foggfield
Athletic come in for me and offer me a role, watching League One and League
Two.
I need the job, I can't say no.

Everyone's journey is different.
But for me, as a scout, you go from: 'Scouting and recruitment's great, isn't it?
Everyone's great.
I'm desperate to do well, desperate to get into the industry.
Will do any job.
Will drive the FA Cup to fricking Essex, you know, will be the kitman as well'

to like:

Pull back the curtain, 'Wizard of Oz' style,
and actually there's some really poor practice.
And there's some really, really,
nasty people.

The Game Doesn't Care
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Scout Report Six

In accordance with the existential phenomenological approaches which underpinned this research, The Corporal's tale is filled with ambiguity, angst and absurdity. His inner conflict is present throughout and projected onto others. As Heidegger (1927/1977) states, The Corporal's *being* is always *being with*. The reader is left unsure why The Corporal continues to do a job he clearly no longer finds meaning in and the chaotic structure, with no clear beginning, middle or end captures this uncertainty. The participant in this instance is someone who was heavily engaged in the present study, who I spent a lot of time with but ultimately, I struggled to make sense of his narrative. That was until I realised it was such a chaotic narrative and needed to be presented (and represented) as such. When attempting to capture the lived experience of scouts such as The Corporal, it was evident that trying to neatly place his responses into higher and lower order themes was almost impossible. Similarly, follow up interviews often elicited different findings to previous conversations depending on The Corporal's recent experiences. This is possibly because more traditional research approaches treat behaviour, experiences and perceptions as stable. The deeper immersion in The Corporal's narrative evidenced his inner conflict and search for meaning (Lichtman, 2006). Having taken several creative turns in my research at this point I doubt that a thematic analysis would have captured this so richly.

Following on from 'The Game Doesn't Care' poem is the song 'The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff'. Initially, Cliff's tale is more upbeat, and a common theme continues to emerge, that scouts are confident in their assessments based on their eyes and ears, something shared with The Corporal. Cliff is the stereotypical scout, he has forgotten more than we could ever know and he's found talent, the gems and geniuses throughout his three decades in the game, but even he begins to feel sidelined. He ends on a rather bleak note stating that soon enough we will all see "the broken future of football". This piece began as a poem, a more structured one than The Corporal's, but for whatever reason, it continued to feel more appropriate as a song. Songwriting can provide an iterative medium for reworking personal stories into structured meaning (Baker and Wigram, 2005) and as Douglas (2020:59) states "Song writing is so alluring and challenging; you don't know what you will find...(song is) an engaging form of dissemination, but the crafting of lyrics and an appropriate melody are extremely useful methods of analysis and interpretation, a process where the phenomenon can begin to show itself". The process certainly needed further analysis and interpretation as the initial poetic iteration was far

too long for a song and required significant trimming. What emerged was the following song to capture Cliff's "will to travel far", "lurking on the touchlines" before having to "fade into the night". This musical form allowed for narrative re-construction, making otherwise tacit meanings become audible (Pavlicevic, 2004).

THE BALLAD OF CLAIRVOYANT CLIFF



At the QR Code below I sing 'The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff', which is developed from field notes, observations and interviews refined into song



SCAN QR CODE



The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff

Copyright © Craig Lawlor: Music and Lyrics (2025)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRgMX_v4pIo&list=RDvRgMX_v4pIo&start_radio=1

The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff

By Craig Lawlor

♩ = 54 ♩ = 55



*Clairvoyant Cliff,
That's my name,
Scout for thirty-six years.
Got all the tools*

6 C# G# A#m F# C# G# A#m F# C# G# F#



*I need: My eyes and both my ears.
I've got the will to travel far,
Up and down the land.
I'm lurking on the touchlines,
Polythene cup in hand.*

♩ = 54 C# G# A#m F# C# G#



*And what am I doing there?
I'm seeing, hearing and feeling.
With all my years of watching games,
I don't miss a thing.
I read their body language,*

6 A#m F# C# G# F#



*Even in winter's chill.
I sense it in an instant,
Character, desire and will.*

The Ballad of Clairvoyant Cliff

Clairvoyant Cliff, that's my name,
Scout for thirty-six years.
Got all the tools I need:
My eyes and both my ears.

I've got the will to travel far,
Up and down the land.
I'm lurking on the touchlines,
Polythene cup in hand.

And what am I doing there?
I'm seeing, hearing and feeling.
With all my years of watching games,
I don't miss a thing.

I read their body language,
Even in winter's chill.
I sense it in an instant—
Character, desire and will.

I've built a strong track record,
No crystal ball in sight.
From grassroots pitches to Selhurst Park,
I've scouted day and night.

I always say, go with your gut!
Live and die by your call.
Don't sit on the fence,
Afraid to take the fall.

It's more than work or hobby—
It's what keeps me alive.
No matter rain or distance,
Four games a week or five.

With cup in hand, and notes in tow,
I watch for flair and chemistry.
These are the game's true elements—
The things that others don't see.

Eyes peeled, ears sharp, boots on the ground,
I watch each touch and pass.
You can keep your computers—
Cos the game's played on the grass.

You can't learn this from textbooks.
No two players are quite the same.
Be clever with each moment—
You have to live the game.

Success is earned, not borrowed,
Through patience, grit, and grind.
But now we fear for our careers,
And question what we'll find.

Because us scouts, we're overlooked
Underpaid and ignored.
We're experts, loyal, tireless—
But rarely are we adored.

Don't get me started on
The prawn sandwich brigade.
They take the credit for our graft,
Eyes and ears they start to fade.

A football club's a sacred place,
Where dreams and hopes ignite.
But even Cliff must one day rest,
And fade into the night.

New criteria for scouting jobs:
No need to watch them play.
Just trust the algorithm—
It won't lead you astray.

The pay? It's scraps or nothing.
At best, discretionary.
All the while gut feel's left behind,
In this frail industry.

What's to become of my record?
The game's run by the blind.
No passion, wisdom, or hard graft—
Just metrics misaligned.

I've given all I've got to this,
And built a vast network.
I've found the gems and geniuses—
Football's been my life's work.

Silenced by science, in the shadows,
Soon out the frame.
I'll let my feet do the talking—
Cliff now just a name.

Sidelined in more ways than one,
All for one? Not at all.
Good luck, you'll see it soon enough—
The broken future of football.

Scout Report Seven

Being brutally honest, at this point I felt that I had presented an overly negative view of scouting. I began to question my own experiences and biases. During my time in the industry, I had some fantastic experiences and some not so good ones, but I wondered if the 'not so good ones' were the ones which continued to surface and were, perhaps, clouding my judgement. I therefore decided to re-enter the field as 'The Outsider'. Denzin (1989) recommends this as the stories of lives in social worlds can bring reflexivity to the fore as researchers interrogate their own interpretive frames. Again, rather than following up with previous participants or feeling the need to go and find more scouts to interview, I re-entered the field with a fresh perspective, having truly exited the field, I reflected considerably with a fresh pair of eyes in an entirely new epoch. Pretorius (2023) states that this combination of primary research and storytelling, using personal experiences as research has the capacity to enable research findings to be emotional, subjective and analytically rich. This was crucial at this stage of the research as I kept reading and hearing that "Scouting has changed, it's not about old blokes in flat caps anymore, it's all technical data and multi-disciplinary teamworking". I decided I better go and see for myself. There are no composite characters to be found here, this is me, as The Outsider, revisiting the field and sharing my own lived experiences.



STORY

The Outsider

The Outsider

It's 7.03pm, Wednesday night and it's relatively mild, autumnal. I've got my ticket and team sheet and I've exchanged pleasantries with the staff on the front desk. I head up the stairs to my right. Hung on the walls are pictures of some of the greats to play for the club, captains holding the cup, a last-gasp winner against a local rival. I grab the door handle and enter the lounge. It's pretty empty, cold. There's half a dozen round tables, each with one or two scouts sat huddled scribbling on their team sheets, scrolling on their phones, exchanging tales and opinions on players. I think back to Cotterill's (2022) assessment:

The image of the scout persists, as the mysterious loner in a flat cap skulking around crumbling stadia, scribbling on bits of paper.

The inference is that this isn't the case anymore but as I re-enter the field, the scouting world once more, I encounter the same people who fit Cotterill's description. Most of the scouts arrive alone, sit on their own and scribble on their team sheet. A handful are in fact wearing the customary flat cap.

As we approach kick off there's a steady flow of scouts entering the room, all looking like they're in a rush – the scout I've come with has just come straight from another game over 45 minutes' drive away. One chap, who looks in more of a hurry than most, is eating a plate of hot food, stood up, studying the incoming team news from other fixtures from Sky Sports News on the huge plasma hung on the wall.

We exchange some small talk with other scouts and the clock on the wall reads 7.37pm as we make our way to the Director's Box. I know a lot of the people

there – the director of one of the clubs who are playing tonight, a manager I used to work with, a scout I recognise, whose name I don't know – we exchange a nod. We sit down as the players begin their march onto the field and I look at the scouts around me, the guy to my right furiously writing the heights of the players next to their name on his team sheet, he's already written their age down whilst he was sat in the lounge. The scout I've come with, who works for a team in the league below, points to his team sheet, to the number 6 for the away team 'We were so close to getting him in the summer, so so close, but their new gaffer came in and started playing him. Gutted'. He's already told me there's not much point in him going to this game tonight, he just wants to get out to 'remind himself what the league looks like'. In fact, looking around there's several people who don't need to be there – a couple who are 'out of work' or 'out of the game', others who work for clubs who couldn't afford any of the players on display tonight but it's the usual story: it's midweek, it's a good chance to 'take in a game'.

The first half is a relatively quiet and even affair. Most the scouts are silently compiling their notes. There's the odd comment here and there 'I've got it as a 4-1-4-1 out of possession, have you?', 'He's surely offside', 'How's he missed that?'. I look down at a scout in front of me – he's sat on his own, scribbling away, and he's wearing a flat cap.

The half-time whistle blows: 0-0. The Director's Box empties and everyone files into their respective lounges – there are three and your allocation depends on how important you are and how much respect you're afforded. I'm not afforded much nowadays as an outsider, last time I was

here I was in the Director's Lounge. There are the customary tea and coffee stations and some appealing cakes and pastries. Whispers hum around the room as some of the scouts, those who were once sat alone, have now latched onto one another as they discuss the game and share the gossip of the last few weeks.

The manager I used to work with enters the lounge, 'Alright big man, how's it going?' he asks as he shakes my hand; I get the habitual 'Where are you now then?' and 'Ah right, full-time at the Uni? What are you doing here tonight then? Are you looking to get back in anytime soon?', inferring do I want to get back into the world of football scouting. My answer should probably be a straight 'No' to the latter, but I don't want to close any doors – your network is your currency, so I tend to say something along the lines of 'If the right thing comes up with the right people? Yeah, of course'. It's good to hear someone say, 'Someone like you shouldn't be out of the scouting game', I appreciate that, but so far there's not been anything tonight that's really enticed me to get back in. He concludes with 'This is me getting out to try and get my name out there again. It's a lonely place let me tell you. The phone stops ringing because no one needs you anymore. That's the nature of it'.

We head back out to our seats, and the second half has already started. It's easy to lose track of time when you're chatting away in the warm lounge at half-time. The gossip continues and the scouts, who were once clandestine adversaries, now began to talk like best pals:

'I really liked him at Red Park Rovers, what did they pay for him?'

'Only compensation, about 200 grand. Liked him, did ya? Lemme tell ya, he's an absolute space cadet'

Suddenly, I get sucked in. I start saying how I think the number 8 is the best player on the pitch, the full back is going to be a Premier League player one day. I've been out of it for over two years but now it's like I've never been away.

One of the players on display I helped sign to scout and recruit in the past and can't help but mention it to the guy sat next to me, who asks in response: 'What did he cost? Was it a million and add ons or was it a million and a half with add ons?' I can't remember exactly but you can't be indecisive or vague in this game, people seem to lose respect for you if you are, so I punt for 'A million and a half with add ons it was'. I get a nod. A few moments later comes the response: 'You have to be a certain type, don't you? You know, have a standout attribute? He didn't have that when I was at South Gale City, and he still doesn't have that. You need to have something special to go for a million and a half and I couldn't see enough to justify that sort of money at the time.'

I don't necessarily agree with him, but I don't think it's worth the hassle of a debate with someone I've just met about something so hypothetical. It reminds me how much you need to use your imagination or deal in guesswork, living in a parallel universe in this game e.g. 'If he didn't cost a million, we'd have signed him' or 'I get the feeling he's going to play in the Premier League one day'. Interestingly a similar conversation then gets struck up around me, the scout who said they were 'so close' to signing, Harrod, the number 6, asks a fellow scout:

'How's Harrod done this season? We were so close to getting him in the summer'

He's talking to the old bloke in the flat cap sat in front of us who turns round and says:

'Been their best player. He moves so well now, not stiff and slow like you'll remember him at Lingsby Town'

'You're so right, he couldn't run, could he? He was big and slow, doesn't look like that now!'

I wanted to ask 'What's changed? How did he get quicker?' But I decide not to, those questions don't seem to go down too well. But reflecting on this, it's a great example – most scouts couldn't imagine Harrod getting quicker or 'less stiff', so they didn't sign him. The team in question 'took a punt' and have been rewarded with a good player. Perhaps this is further evidence of the alchemy which Calvin (2013) proclaims scouts possess.

In amongst the gossip there's been 3 quickfire goals for the home side. Interestingly, the scouts don't seem too bothered about the goals themselves, they make a note of the players who scored them and say 'Tell you what, that's not an easy finish' but little of their notetaking or assessment of players seem to be around the most important action of the game – goals. The scouts around me start to share their reflections as the game reaches its conclusion, the away side have given up and the home team are knocking the ball around in their own half, running the clock down: 'Never a 3-0 game, Harnet Borough (the away team) had the three best chances!', 'What a weird game', 'Jairo's never a centre forward, can't believe he missed that chance!', 'What a poor game. I tell you what, I can see both these sides struggling this year'. The game reaches 87 minutes and most the scouts have left the stadium, I feel the insatiable urge to do the same – it's just what you do as a scout so I leave my seat, head down the steps, into the hall and past the pictures of the greats on the walls, say my thank yous and

goodbyes at reception and make my way into the October night.

Reflecting on it all as I get home:

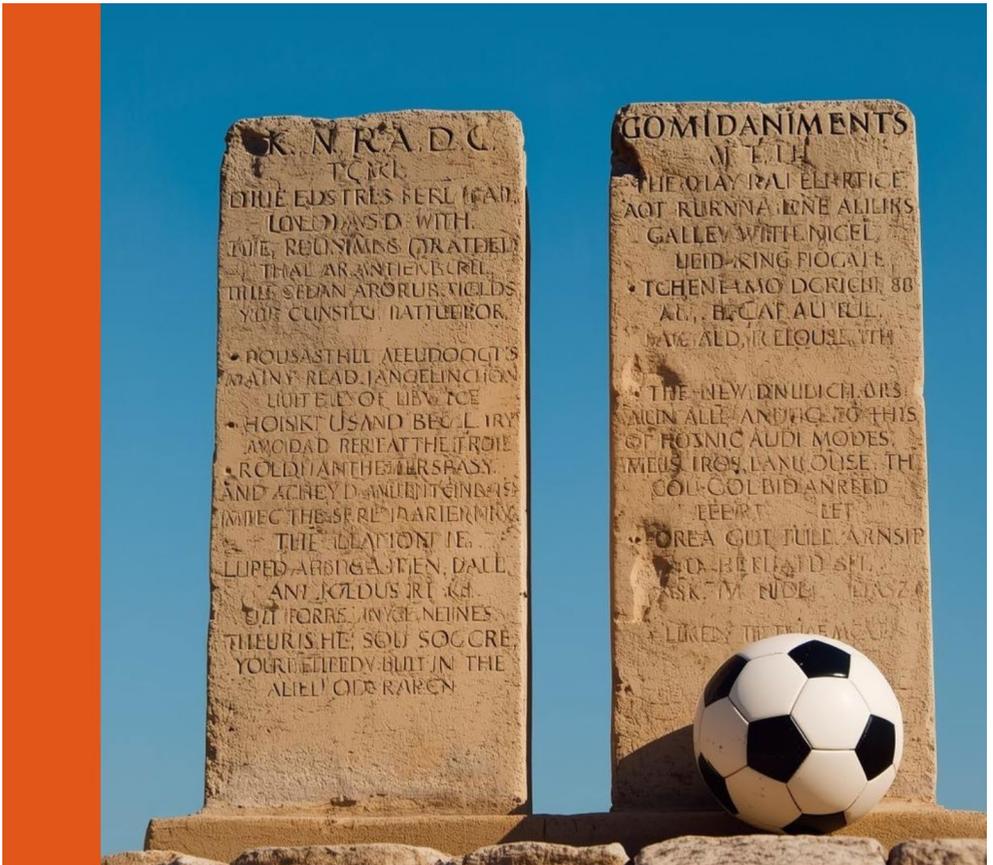
You have your ticket; you literally have your ticket in your hand to this underworld, and you feel a part of it. But you question if you really are or ever were part of it. Even more so now, I know I'm no longer a part of it. I'm not like the club legends on the wall in the stadium, I don't have anything to show for ever being a scout. The ties are loose between you and the club you work for and the same with other scouts who you sporadically see at games. You acquire a habitus of being guarded and decisive and not wanting to debate, to get things wrong, to lose your network. I felt and I still feel like something of an imposter, not so much in the scouting world but in the football world. There will always be a scout who's been doing it longer or someone who played 500 league games or there's the director and you need to do your best to act like them, talk like them and if you aren't already, become one of them to really be accepted. I felt myself slipping into bad faith and becoming the scout again, even though I wasn't. I arrived as Craig Lawlor but when I was in the ground and the game started, I went straight back to being a scout. I too felt that loneliness after the game had ended, the feeling of being back at home, alone, away from the excitement of the game and removed from shaking hands with a former manager and a director of a football club. And I, at least for the night, had to mourn the death of my identity as football scout, part of the inner ring. At the time I felt part of it but as I come away, I feel more detached than ever. Was I ever really part of it?

THE END

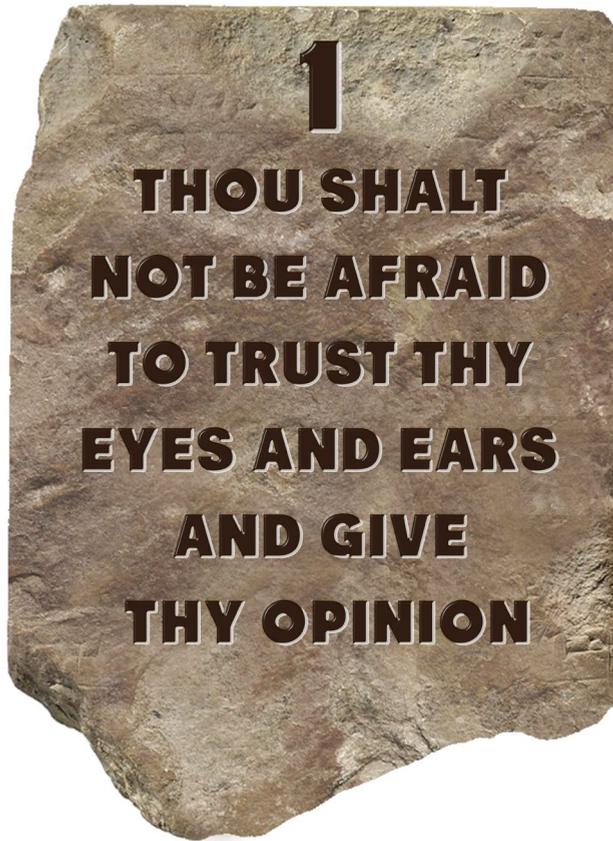
Scout Report Eight

An important reflection for me throughout this journey was 'me as the research tool and the data'. As I had learnt through phenomenological methodologies, I could not remove myself from the research and besides, why would I want to? This was a crucial learning and reflexive experience for me. It led me to wonder if I had ever really been part of the inner sanctum and it too helped me to better understand the perspectives of Andy, The Corporal and Clairvoyant Cliff. I began to see, with fresh eyes, the habitus which scouts collect. Habitus being the way social structures, often unconscious and internalised through cultural norms, shape individual dispositions and behaviours (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Bourdieu, 1979).

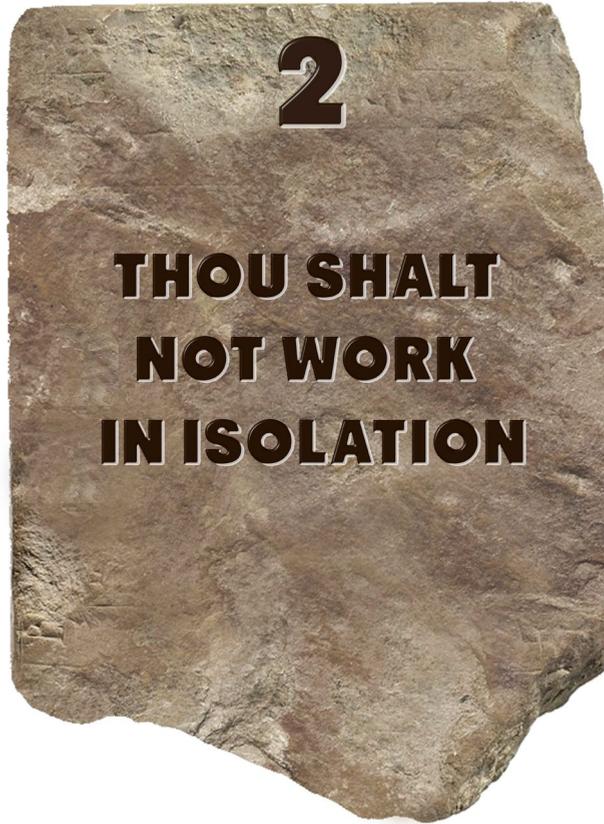
Also at this point, I felt I had spent a considerable amount of time philosophising over scouts' experiences and felt that more concrete recommendations were needed to try and impart what I had learnt through my immersions in other scouts' experiences. What emerged was 'The 10 Commandments of Football Scouting'. There is considerable support for the creation of simple guidelines to summarise qualitative work. Mol (2002) states that short prescriptive rules function well as devices for shaping practice especially when grounded in ethnographic detail. These simple normative statements have the capacity to translate complex findings into actionable recommendations, to communicate findings to practitioners who require immediate guidance (Patton, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2001). More specifically, Schön (1983) states that concise 'commandments' can capture reflective wisdom for practitioners if derived from iterative reflection. These commandments were built from participant recommendations, especially those which aligned with my observations and experiences in the field, and were initially set out in the paper, 'How to scout... or rather, how not to scout in professional football: Advice from an outsider looking in' by Lawlor and Palmer (2024). Whilst not presented as a story, poem or song, it would have been remiss of me to not include these in the research findings. More akin to more traditional qualitative analysis, this allowed the capturing of practical, specific recommendations which, again, were not apparent in such simple forms prior to the deeper interpretation and reflection.



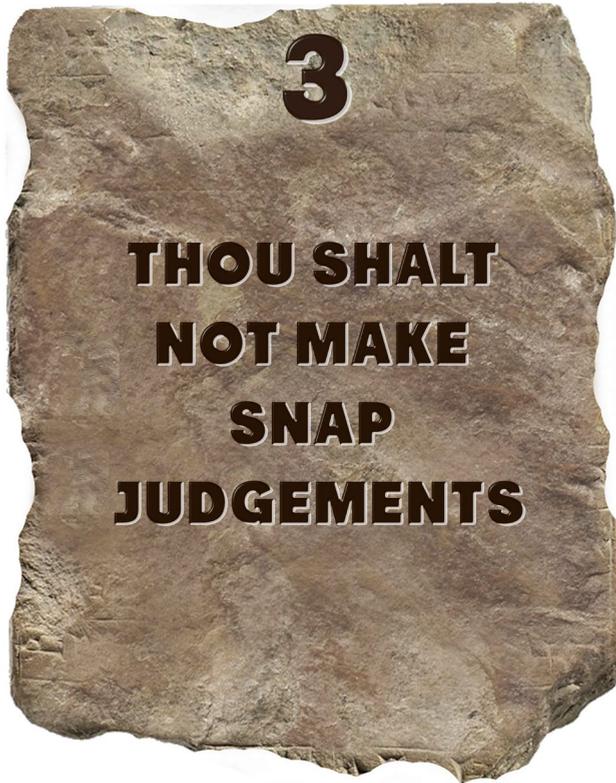
The 10 Commandments of Football Scouting



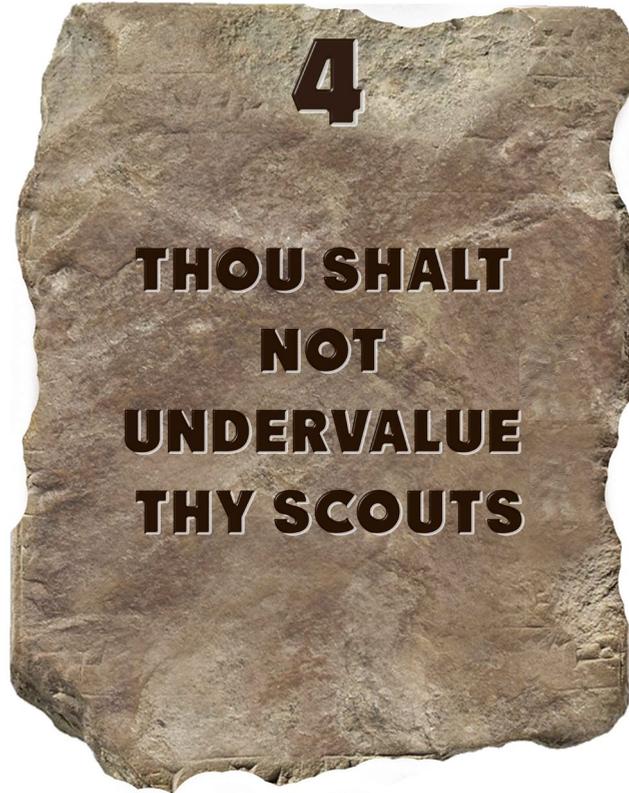
1. SCOUTS SHOULD RELY ON THEIR TRAINED INTUITION AND PERSONAL JUDGMENT, BUT THIS MUST BE BALANCED WITH STRUCTURED TRAINING AND COLLABORATIVE INPUT TO AVOID BIAS AND ERROR.



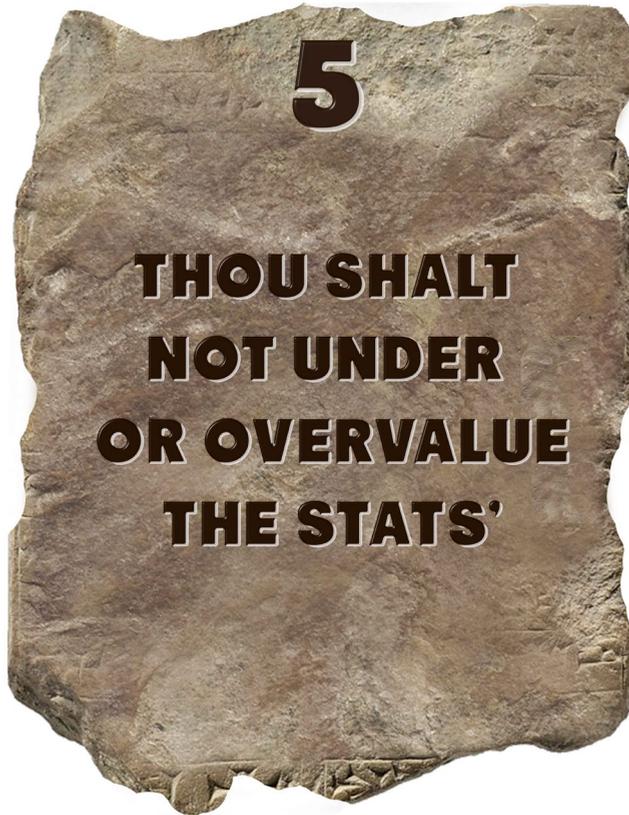
**2. SCOUTING SHOULD BE A COLLECTIVE
EFFORT, WHERE MULTIPLE
PERSPECTIVES AND SHARED
EVALUATIONS LEAD TO MORE ACCURATE
AND EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT
DECISIONS.**



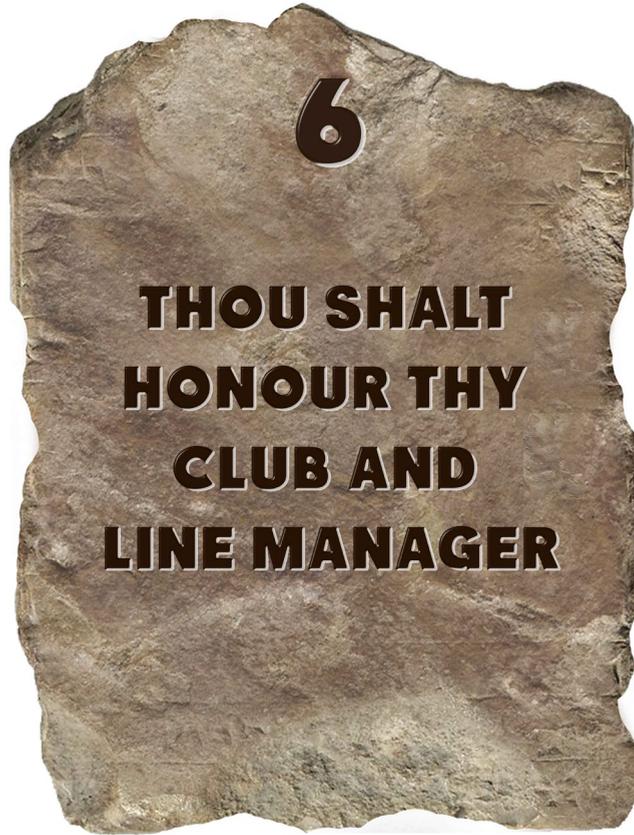
**3. QUICK, INSTINCTIVE DECISIONS CAN
LEAD TO TALENT WASTAGE; SCOUTS
SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO REFLECT,
REVISE OPINIONS AND USE SYSTEMATIC
EVALUATION METHODS.**



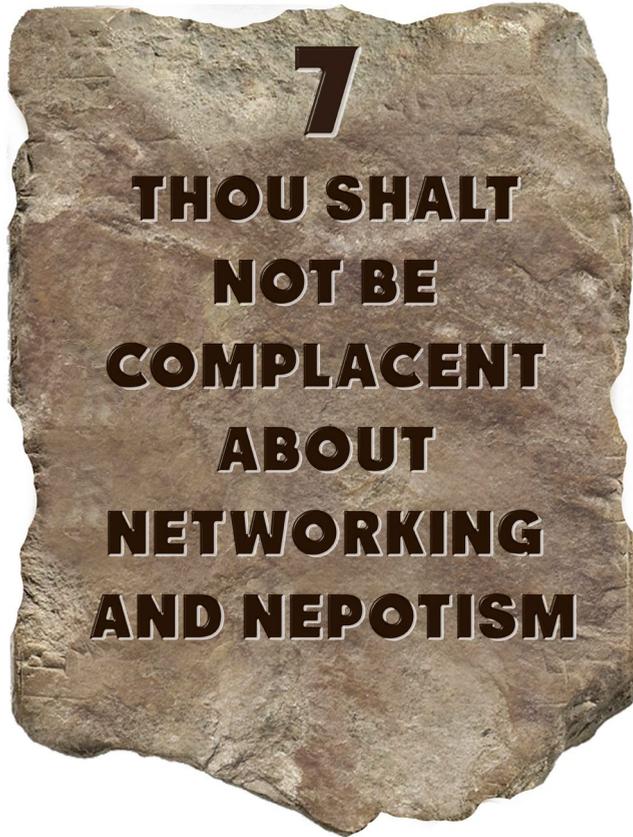
**4. SCOUTS OFTEN FACE POOR WORKING
CONDITIONS AND LACK RECOGNITION;
VALUING THEIR EXPERTISE AND
PROVIDING CLEAR ROLES AND SUPPORT
CAN IMPROVE BOTH MORALE AND
PERFORMANCE.**



**5. DATA ANALYTICS SHOULD
COMPLEMENT, NOT REPLACE, HUMAN
JUDGMENT; INTEGRATING BOTH CAN
LEAD TO MORE HOLISTIC AND ACCURATE
SCOUTING DECISIONS.**



6. SCOUTS MUST ALIGN THEIR WORK WITH THE CLUB'S PHILOSOPHY AND STRATEGY, REQUIRING CLEAR GUIDANCE AND COMMUNICATION FROM LEADERSHIP.

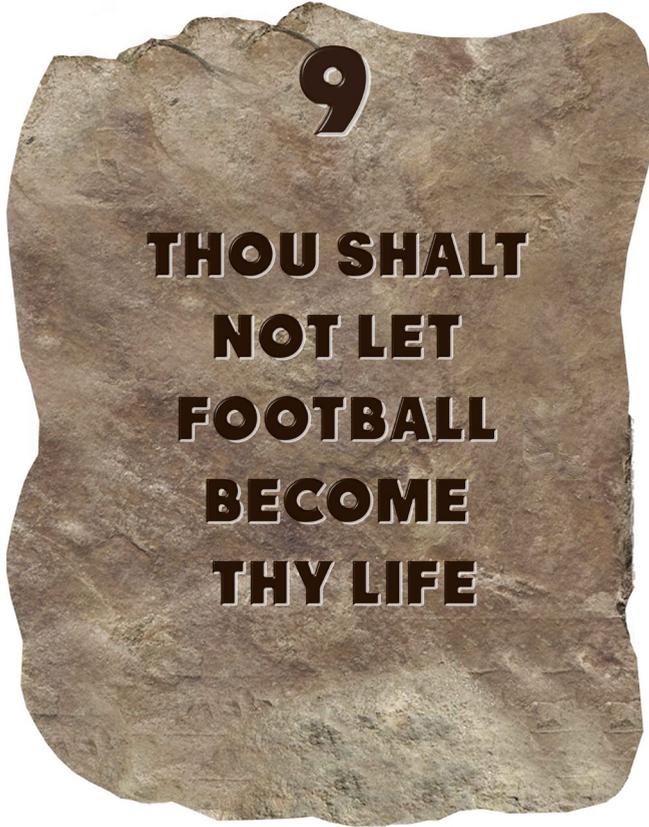


**7. SUCCESS IN SCOUTING OFTEN
DEPENDS ON PERSONAL NETWORKS BUT
UNCHECKED NEPOTISM CAN STIFLE
INNOVATION AND DIVERSITY IN
RECRUITMENT.**

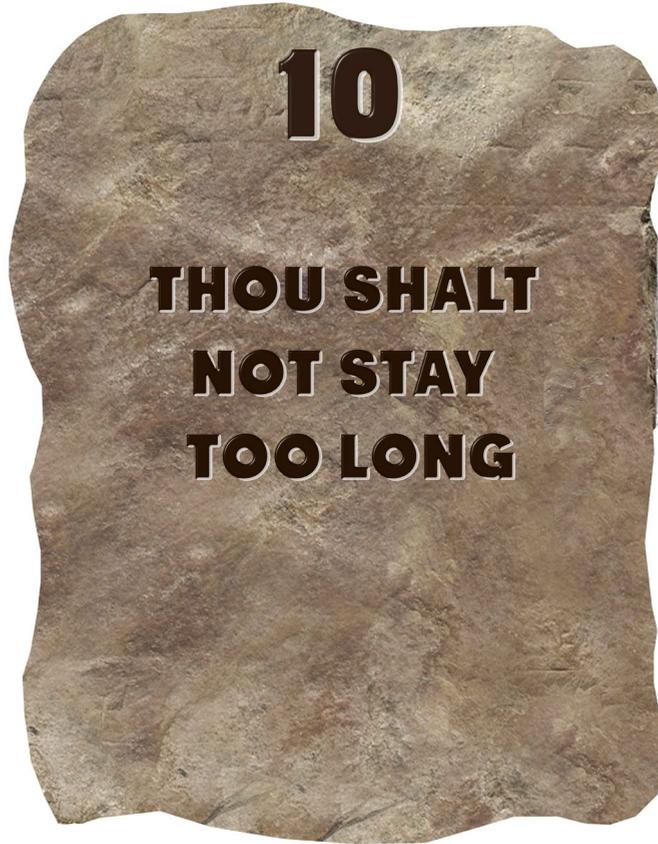
8

**THOU SHALT
NOT TRY TO
WATCH EVERY
PLAYER AT
EVERY CLUB**

**8. ATTEMPTING TO SCOUT ALL
PLAYERS IS UNREALISTIC AND
INEFFICIENT; TARGETED SCOUTING
ALIGNED WITH CLUB NEEDS IS MORE
EFFECTIVE.**



9. SCOUTING CAN BECOME AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION; MAINTAINING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS ESSENTIAL FOR LONG-TERM WELLBEING AND EFFECTIVENESS.



**10. IF SCOUTS ARE UNDERVALUED,
UNSUPPORTED, OR LOSE PASSION,
THEY SHOULD CONSIDER LEAVING THE
ROLE TO PRESERVE THEIR WELLBEING
AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY.**

Scout Report Nine

Suddenly, after compiling the '10,Commandments' things felt clearer and simpler more impactful conclusions were possible. The scout is undervalued. They receive a relative pittance, they travel hundreds of miles, submit reports on thousands of players, they are on the periphery on their organisation and are striving for recognition. This felt like such a simple conclusion initially, but I felt I was finally at 'the heart of the matter'. Recognition and reward are what scouts need. Even if it only costs the club some basic mileage and a warm snack.

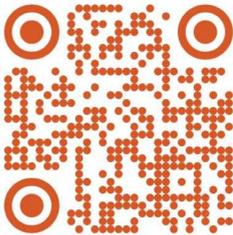
The next song, 'The Ode to the Scout' is offered as a final gesture, one that recognises the scout's value and calls for change. This ode brings the study to a close, not with resignation but with recognition, respect and a renewed sense of purpose. Songs mobilise affective responses that paragraphs rarely achieve, making dissemination more impactful (Pavlicevic and Ansdell, 2004), they condense social meanings and can serve as concise interpretive conclusions (Frith, 1996) and can perform that finalising interpretive act (Ochs and Capps, 2001). It is time to 'give him a shout', 'not leave him full of doubt', 'let him in', and 'not force him out': this is 'The Ode to the Scout'.

THE ODE TO THE SCOUT



At the QR Code below I sing 'The Ode to the Scout', which is developed from field notes, observations and interviews refined into song

SCAN QR CODE



'The Ode to the Scout'.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zux3m3SSdc&list=RD9zux3m3SSdc&start_radio=1

The Ode to the Scout

By Craig Lawlor

♩ = 108



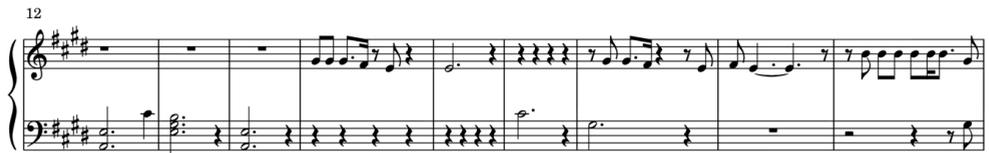
VERSE 1: *He sits in the stand all alone Making notes*

5



Taking calls on his telephone He shivers in the cold of the night But he's got passion, so he'll be alright

12



VERSE 2: *Cos this man is a scout And he's always on the lookout You can't succeed*

21



*Without him, so don't even try
You'll always need his trained eye*

BRIDGE ONE: *Cos it takes a genius to know one
And talent to imagine what's next*

28



Overlooking the skill of this man is something that leaves me perplexed

33



CHORUS ONE:

The Ode to the Scout

Verse One

He sits in the stand all alone
Making notes taking calls on his telephone
He shivers in the cold of the night
But he's got passion, so he'll be alright

Verse Two

Cos this man is a scout
And he's always on the lookout
You can't succeed without him, so don't even try
You'll always need his trained eye

Bridge One

Cos it takes a genius to know one
And talent to imagine what's next
Overlooking the skill of this man
Is something that leaves me perplexed

Chorus One

Give him what he deserves
Let him in don't force him out
He needs more than a pat on the back
This is the ode to the scout

Verse Three

Now back alone in his car
On the M6 under a sky like tar
He's undervalued, that he already knows
For all his work, he's got little to show

Bridge Two

Cos it takes a genius to know one
And thick skin to put your neck on the line
Not recognising this man's work
Will only leave you misaligned

Chorus Two

Give him what he deserves
Don't leave him full of doubt
He needs more than a pat on the back
This is the ode to the scout

Middle Eight

Still full of anxiety
No clarity, ambiguity
In search of meaning and autonomy
But angst pervades his destiny

Verse Four

He sits and writes his report
It's detailed, not just some retort
Checks it over, presses submit
Unsure if anybody will read it

Pre-Chorus Three

It takes a genius to know one
And dedication day after day
Underestimating this man's work
Will no doubt lead you astray

Outro Repeat to Fade

Let's give him a shout
Let him in, don't force him out
Don't leave him full of doubt
This is the ode to the scout

Scout Report Ten

Despite its focus on despair, nausea, anxiety, angst and other existential themes, this study ultimately concludes with a sense of hope and affirmation. This is crucial as MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2017:3) state that musical presentation is a potent vehicle for affirmation and collective meaning-making. This research has explored the emotional and psychological toll of scouting, yet this final song also captures the depth of what has been learned: we cannot succeed without the scout. The role, though often overlooked and lacking a defined essence, is, paradoxically, essential. A single written paragraph could not do justice to the complexity of this work (Pavlicevic, 2004), which has unfolded through varied methods of dissemination and reflection.

Conclusion

This paper, on the face of things is about football scouting... *'But it's not'* (Palmer *et al.*, 2024). It's actually about uncovering the lived experience through immersion in the lives of others, which in this case, draws upon the example of football scouting. It has been our intention to evidence the value of revisiting, refining and re-presenting primary data through more creative methods to 'get to the heart of the matter', to allow the phenomena to show themselves, to avoid making rash or arriving at premature conclusions quickly or carelessly. This paper should give the researcher faith that they will always be a part of their study, that their interpretations are valuable and the depth and richness of the 'data within' – reaching inwards - is often more valuable than a late trolley dash down the data aisle.

----- **Run Credits** -----

Poet

Craig Lawlor

Author

Craig Lawlor

Biographer – Storyteller

Craig Lawlor

Song Writer – Lyricist

Craig Lawlor: *40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll*

Craig Lawlor: *40 Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas*

Craig Lawlor: *The Ode to the Scout*

Composer and Score Writer

Craig Lawlor: *40p a Mile and a Sausage Roll*

Craig Lawlor: *40 Centavos por Milla y Algunas Tapas*

Craig Lawlor: *The Ode to the Scout*

Language Interpreter [Español]

Craig Lawlor

Performance Director

Craig Lawlor

Performing Artist

Vocals: Craig Lawlor

Guitar and drums: Craig Lawlor

Sound Engineer, Mixing and Recording

Craig Lawlor

Creative Director

Craig Lawlor

Producer

Craig Lawlor

Presenter

Craig Lawlor

Philosopher and Theorist

Craig Lawlor

Ethnographic Field Observer

Craig Lawlor

Social Media Promotion

Craig Lawlor

Doctoral Researcher

Craig Lawlor

Research Assistant

Clive Palmer

APPENDIX 1

Job Description Football Scout



Job Title	Football Scout
Department	Scouting
Reports to	Anonymous Stakeholder
Location	Anywhere/Nowhere
Salary	40p a mile, Last Season's Club Coat, Sausage Roll (If you prove yourself)

Job Summary:

Do you love football? So much so that you want to watch (at least) 3 video games a day? Are you happy to travel the length and breadth of the country (and sometimes abroad) 3-5 times a week? Are you full of existential angst? Then football scouting might be for you!

We're looking for someone with a real passion for football who can join our group of scouting insiders. Those who don't love football need not apply.

Person Specification:

- Passionate about searching, researching and identifying players; with a strong work ethic and drive to succeed
- An analytical mind, good observation skills
- You have to be professional around the place otherwise if you're laughing and joking with everyone and you go into a recruitment meeting everyone will say "We're not listening to him because he's a clown"

Essential Criteria:

- Owns a notepad and pen and is capable of writing reports on players
- Ready and willing to give their opinion
- Doesn't sit on the fence, says 'yes' or 'no' to a player straightaway
- Some experience playing or coaching football (preferably at the top level)
- Good eyes and ears, an excellent feel for players
- Knows lots of people in football and is willing and able to do some digging on players

Essential Qualifications:

- N/A

Desirable Qualifications:

- FA Talent Identification Level Two or Three
- A related undergraduate degree
- One of those independent scouting ones - PFSA, IPSO etc

Disclaimer: It helps if you already know someone at the club. If you don't then we might never get back to you. You might get sacked. This is a lonely job, please try to ignore that by watching more and more football

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Reviewer Comments

This is an unusually courageous contribution to qualitative inquiry. What presents itself to the reader first is the unapologetic centrality of the human researcher. Rather than adopting the distancing techniques often reinforced in academic norms, Lawlor embraces the full presence of ‘Craig’ the person as the foundation upon which ‘Craig’ the researcher can work. This integration is not indulgent, it is methodologically enriching. By allowing the self to stand as a legitimate site of knowledge production, the study moves far beyond the epitomical constraints that typically restrict qualitative analysis.

The Russian dolls concept serves as an elegant metaphor for this inward movement. Each ‘doll’ represents a deeper layer of self-examination, a repeated return to experience through new interpretive lenses. In many ways, the metaphor functions as the study’s organising logic, where knowledge emerges not from wider sampling or additional interviews, but from recursive depth, from the bravery of continually re-entering and ‘revisiting’ his own experience to see what else it might reveal. It is a method that asks for courage, and Lawlor demonstrates it in full.

What makes this paper particularly significant is the extent to which it mobilises creative analytical practices as legitimate research tools. The work does not merely report an experience, it transforms it into story, into song, into poetry, and even into another language. This multilingual reinterpretation is not a gimmick. It becomes a form of synthesis, a way of unsettling and re-seeing the emotional and existential contours of scouting. The analytic act is both creative and rigorous, where meaning is produced through composition, translation, and re-composition. This study stands as a quiet but powerful assertion that qualitative research methods hold meaningful value when permitted to operate beyond the confines of procedural convention.

In this context, the paper moves beyond the boundaries of a study, it becomes a supervision masterclass. The supervisory voice, patient, encouraging, permissive of risk, echoes through this work. It models what it looks like when a supervisor supports a researcher not merely to collect data, but to trust their own experience, creativity, and intellectual instincts. This ethos runs throughout the paper and becomes part of its contribution.

Ultimately, Lawlor and Palmer show that bravery in methodological experimentation does not compromise academic rigour. On the contrary, it expands its possibilities, offering a blueprint for qualitative scholars seeking deeper, more human, and more imaginative ways of knowing.