

Having the right medical people in place to look after the players seemed so obvious to me and the further I became involved in coaching, the more I pushed for improvements in this department. I remember one particular meeting I had with AJ Wait and the other directors where I explained what a valuable young team they had at the club and why they needed to be protected with more than “an old boy with a bucket of water and a sponge”. I told them they couldn’t have somebody that didn’t really know what they’re doing looking after talent like Stevie Kember and a very short while later I was proved right.

This debate escalated rapidly following a game against Tottenham when Alan Mullery tackled Steve Kember from behind, a challenge that cracked Steve’s fibula. It wasn’t obvious at the time, but I had attended ‘Treatment of Injury’ courses at Lillieshall so I had a hunch that the scan the following morning would show up a crack. I told Stevie to go home and rest, then when he arrived at Selhurst Park the following morning for the scan, whatever he did, “Do not let anyone boss you around and tell you to run it off by lapping the pitch... wait for me to get in before you do anything!” Anyway, by the time I arrived Jess Willard and Bert Head had insisted Steve went for a jog on the pitch, which caused the bone to snap completely. I was choked, but at least it highlighted the need for a change in how the players were looked after.

I was also fixated by the need to study the opposition ahead of a game. I insisted that we had every team Palace were due to play watched twice – their reserve team had to be observed too. Detailed reports were then written up, listing the dangers and weakness posed by every player. I would study these for hours and hours and I made it my business to know every single thing about every single player in the top flight - in the end this obsessive research was starting to make me ill. I became very introverted and a bit too hard, but that didn’t matter because it was helping us get results.

Eventually, the combination of being able to call upon top medical advice, as well as thorough preparation on the opposition, allowed me to be more confident I could push the players to the limit in training because I knew I wasn’t harming them. You’d be surprised how far you can push a footballer and some of them were physically sick on a daily basis because of the rigorous physical exercise I put them through. You should have seen the faces of some of the new players who arrived at the club when they realised what was in store for them. I remember Bobby Tambling looking at me in horror and saying, “I’ve never been asked to train like this anywhere else!” I agreed with him before telling him to join in and do what he could until he got used to it. In the end all the new boys acclimatised to my regime and even started refusing



1961 – George Petchey and Vic Rouse walk on to the pitch before a 5-1 win at Shrewsbury Town