

# JONATHAN AGNEW



Since moving from the playing field to the commentary box I have dabbled at reporting on many sports other than cricket. There has been some rugby here and there and a host of minor sports in my newspaper days. After my attempt to commentate on archery in last summer's Olympics, I hope to be at Rio 2016 as BBC Radio's equestrianism commentator (a curious non-sequitur, I'll grant you, but a very exciting challenge!).

There is a glaring absentee from my

raft of journalistic experience: football. I have never reported on a single match, and after the manic start to this season I cannot help but feel a twinge of sympathy for those that do. It must be exhausting! Sackings, transfer speculation and a seemingly limitless rumour mill often overshadow the results of the matches themselves – and who is driving this supply of 24 hour rolling news? Is it the media in its insatiable thirst for selling newspapers and fuelling radio phone-ins? Or is it the sport itself, buried under a mountain of debt and desperate for instant success?

There is an argument for both. Back page headlines clamouring for managers to be sacked and of clubs in crisis breed disquiet amongst shareholders and fans, while knee jerk appointments and dismissals are the football equivalent of baiting the waters for sharks – the hungry media knows that a good story will be along in a minute.

This weekend our focus will be on the Stadium of Light where the champions, Manchester United, take

on Sunderland, whose managerial upheavals illustrate the point. Given that Paolo di Canio's appointment in April this year was always controversial – and not merely for football reasons – the maverick Italian could do no more than the task he was given: he prevented Sunderland's relegation. And yet, after just five matches of the new season di Canio was sacked af-

ter losing the support of the dressing room.

It is possible that Sunderland have acted swiftly to avert a total disaster, but at this level is five games a realistic benchmark? Even those managers with years of service behind them cannot avoid the hostility of the

media – there was talk of a crisis at Arsenal after they lost their very first game because Arsene Wenger had not made any signings. Two weeks later he broke the club record buying Mesut Özil from Real Madrid and shortly afterwards Arsenal were top of the league. As my teenage stepson would say: 'Chill out, everyone!'

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