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# INTRODUCTION: OLD TRAFFORD, 2004

José Mourinho first burst into my consciousness on the evening of Tuesday 9 March 2004. I'm sure it was the same for millions of other football fans that night. Certainly every supporter in England was suddenly talking about him: the crazy guy in the dark overcoat who'd just gone running and jumping along the touchline at Old Trafford.

Mourinho had every right to be excited. Portuguese star Costinha's last-gasp equalizer against Manchester United was a huge moment for the manager and his Porto side. It was the first knockout stage of the Champions League, and the defensive midfielder's goal sent United crashing out and put Porto on their way to winning the cup with the big ears. It was a seismic moment for Mourinho on many levels, not least because, ultimately, the convincing 3–0 Champions League final triumph over Monaco in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, on 26 May meant that within a month the man in the overcoat would be announcing himself as a 'special one' as he took charge of Chelsea. Now that really put him at the forefront of my mind.

At this point you should know that I am a Chelsea fan and have been since their 1967 FA Cup final against Tottenham. I was seven years old at that time and football mad. England had won the World Cup the previous summer and, believe it or not, the 1967 Cup final at Wembley was the next big match to be shown 'live' on television

way back then. It beggars belief now in the multi-channel world of digital television in Ultra High Definition and 3D, where we can enjoy wall-to-wall football on our screens virtually every day. Not in the swinging Sixties you couldn't, which is why FA Cup final day was so special back then and why it was such a huge occasion for the nation, not just the followers of the finalists.

In May 1967 I didn't support a specific football team, although my dad frequently used to take me down the road to Nuneaton Borough FC, my home-town club, which I loved. It wasn't quite as glamorous as watching the Cup final, though, so on 20 May I was hugely excited. In the morning my friends and I went over to the rec (the recreational playground at the Miners' Welfare and Social Club in Heath End Road, Nuneaton) and played out the final. I was on the Chelsea team and the rules were simple: the first team to ten were the winners. We won, and we won easily: something like 10–5, maybe 10–6. Anyway, that was it.

On the basis of that great victory I went home and confidently told my mum and dad and elder sister Alison that Chelsea were going to win that afternoon. They didn't. Goals from Jimmy Robertson and Frank Saul saw to that as Spurs won 2–1 with Chelsea only managing an eighty-fifth-minute consolation score from the great Bobby Tambling. I suppose I could have been a glory hunter and swapped allegiance to winners Tottenham and forgotten all about the losers in blue, but something deep inside me had stirred that day, had been awakened by that defeat, and my lifelong love for Chelsea was born.

Little did I know that twenty years later I'd be living the dream as a sports journalist regularly covering my beloved Chelsea and getting to know the stars and key figures at the club, from the boardroom to the dressing room and on to the pressroom. Which is why I made sure that I was there that day when Mourinho was unveiled at Stamford Bridge and took control of 'my' Chelsea.

I wanted to see what this guy was all about, introduce myself to him as soon as possible and try to forge the sort of close relationship with him that I'd previously enjoyed with the likes of Ken Bates, Matthew Harding, Glenn Hoddle, Ruud Gullit and Luca Vialli. So on Sunday 2 June 2004 I strode to the Bridge to hear Mourinho come out with that famous 'special one' line, which would, from that moment on, become his moniker worldwide. He was brilliant. He was spellbinding. He was box office.

Unfortunately the organization on the day was a complete shambles. For some reason Chelsea had decided to try to stage the press conference in their pressroom, a pretty small space close to the tunnel and dressing rooms for ease of access after matches for managers. However, the arrival of Mourinho was international news. There were TV film crews, radio reporters and journalists from all over Europe in attendance, some from even further afield. The room, and the facilities in it, were nowhere near big enough. So it was decided to do the press conference, or more accurately press conferences, in stages.

First, there was the official unveiling in front of everyone, with far too many people crammed into the pressroom for comfort or safety. Afterwards there was a series of other conferences with selected, smaller groups such as the international press, the British TV and radio boys, the UK's daily newspaper reporters and finally the UK's Sunday newspapers. Each group was looking for something specifically for themselves, something exclusive to their outlets over and above Mourinho at the general press conference. It's not an unusual situation but it is unusual for a club to try to do all of this in one of the smallest rooms at the stadium.

Now, I was a Sunday newspaper man at the time and, as usual, we were the last in line. That's because, unlike that of the others', our deadline for reports was not until the weekend, rather than on

that day. Therefore our need for access was not as immediate. The problem, though, is that managers and players quickly get tired of question after question and by the time they have done all the other interviews and finally get to the Sunday newspaper guys they are fed up and just want to get away. Often, an expected twenty-minute slot can end up as just a few short minutes.

The other problem for the Sunday press is the need to monitor what questions and answers the TV, radio and daily newspapers have already asked in the earlier conferences. It's not about spying or eavesdropping; it's to avoid repetition and to ensure they ask something completely different to gain a new, fresh angle on the story. Let's face it: no one wants to pick up their newspaper or go online on Sunday to read information and comments that they saw on TV, heard on the radio or read in the daily newspapers days before. The trouble is: how can you monitor all of that when you are outside standing on the tarmac? So, suffice to say, I was not best pleased at facing the very real possibility that anything we got from Mourinho could turn out to be old news by the weekend.

So, just before Sunday's press conference was finally about to begin, I made my protest in a feisty clash with Chelsea's press chief Simon Greenberg. He was sitting alongside Mourinho at the top table when I ripped into him. It was a short, sharp, controlled blast about the chaotic nature of the press conference. I'm pretty sure I would have done it anyway, whatever the event or whoever the individual, because the proceedings thus far had been a complete shambles, but I admit I also viewed the occasion as an ideal opportunity for me to force my way into Mourinho's mind right from the start. It worked. He couldn't help but be aware of my brief but forceful interruption. I knew he had noticed me, I knew it had registered and I knew I had succeeded in making an early impact. It might just have been, 'Huh, who's this stroppy, mouthy guy?', or

worse, but at least I'd made myself stand out. It was a start.

The challenge now was to exploit that impact by working to forge a close and, hopefully, ongoing relationship. I did that, and more. And so it all began.

# 1

## BOLTON AWAY

There were still five minutes left, but two goals from Frank Lampard had surely settled it, so I pressed the 'send' button on my laptop and emailed my match report early. My rationale was that if anything dramatic did happen in those final few minutes I could always ring the office and add the extra information over the telephone. However, in my mind it was already 'job done' – not just for me but for Chelsea and for José. It was Saturday 30 April 2005.

I got up from my desk, slipped out of the press box and hurried down the stairs at the Reebok Stadium into the reception area. I was moving quickly and purposefully because I didn't want to miss the moment. The Bolton receptionist looked up and asked, 'Are you with Chelsea?' I just smiled at her and said 'Yes' and kept on going. I marched unchallenged through the doors to the changing rooms, down the tunnel and then stood pitchside as the seconds ticked away.

Chelsea's Head of Communications Simon Greenberg was right beside me with Mourinho sitting expectantly on the Chelsea bench just a few feet away, waiting for that fateful, final whistle. Within moments referee Steve Dunn duly signalled the end of the game to confirm a 2–0 win for Chelsea and, most importantly and significantly, the prized Premier League crown to go with it. I watched closely,