

# Two content marketing essentials you can learn from great football writing

[Martin Cloake](#)

Do your content writers have the depth of knowledge to win fans for your brand?

The article below was first published on this site as a straightforward celebration of great writing by some exceptional journalists, or, as we might now call them, content creators. It is written by Martin Cloake, part of the editorial team at Progressive Content.

Two things struck me about it, and made me want to share it again in the run up to the Euro 2016 final.

First, and most importantly, is how the men and women listed below used their editorial skill and specialist knowledge to rise above all the other writing on the same topic. There's always been competition for eyeballs. Quality will gain the attention of readers now, just as it has done over countless football seasons.

Secondly is how the passion for good writing shines through in Martin's descriptions. Here is clearly a man who loves the written word as much as he does the beautiful game. And he can write pretty well himself.

So, next time you are commissioning some content, ask yourself whether your journalist is not only a subject matter expert but a really good writer too. Then consider whether the person who will edit their text is as passionate and skilled as Martin.

If they're not, maybe we should talk about how [Content Cloud](#) can help set that straight. Whatever the case, I hope you enjoy this stroll through the back pages.

*Miles Kendall, content strategist, Content Cloud*

## **7 great football writers**

Football has been a consuming passion of mine since I was about six years old, and one of my earliest memories is listening to the 1972 UEFA Cup final between Tottenham Hotspur and Wolverhampton Wanderers on the old solid state radio my mum allowed me to perch on the bedside table. Since I've been interested in sport, I've read about it too. I could probably create a list of the best 77 football writers, but here are seven who have had a special effect on me since I was bitten by the bug.

### **1. Ken Jones**

We read the *Daily Mirror* in my house. I started at the back, and usually Frank McGhee or Ken Jones had the splash, with a big story about football or boxing. In those days, newspaper reports could paint pictures of sporting events, because the cameras were not there to broadcast them live

and leave the next morning's papers to concoct controversy and over-analyse. I learned about the power of good writing from those reports just as much as I did from reading Dickens and Hardy at school. Jones was a great hero, shaping my early attitudes to sport, introducing me to early heroes such as Pat Jennings, Martin Chivers and John Conteh and installing a lifelong appreciation of quality tabloid journalism. Jones went on to write for *The Independent* when it launched, showing that he could ply his trade on any platform and for any audience, but always with style and always readable. Jones has been at the top for as long as I've liked sport.

## **2. Hunter Davies**

Hunter Davies made me want to write. More specifically, his book *The Glory Game* made me want to write. The book was a groundbreaking inside view of a football club – Spurs, the one I support, as it happens. It was the first insider view of a top club, and what also stood out was that it had a whole chapter about the fans – and that was in the day when no one wrote about the fans. Davies approached the book as an investigative journalist who loved sport, which helped set it apart. He continues to write about sport, along with other obsessions such as The Beatles and fell walking, bringing an irreverence that is a much-needed reminder of sport's real place in the grand scheme of things. His memoir *The Beatles, Football and Me* was sniffily dismissed for being obsessed with minor detail, yet it's Davies's eye for the small detail that marks him out. The book is very

evocative of time and place, and puts over an accurate picture of a man whose sharpness and industry was wonderfully evident on a memorable afternoon when I got to interview him a few years ago.

### **3. David Lacey**

David Lacey was the Don of football journalism as I grew up. His was an old-school style that somehow never seemed dated, and I loved his zippy intros. Typical was his opening line of the match report on one of the most dramatic games he ever covered, the England v Argentina 'Hand of God' game in the 1986 World Cup: "The sorcery, not to mention the sauce, of Diego Maradona ended England's hopes in the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City yesterday". The style wasn't to everyone's taste, but I always admired his willingness to play with words while remaining intensely readable. Lacey knows his football, and he's seen the game through several golden ages. His byline catches my eye to this day.

### **4. David Conn**

David Conn has carved a reputation not only as a fine investigative writer, but as the conscience of football. He's unashamedly a fan, and he understands football's place in the bigger picture. I realised recently that we are the same age, and that we had been at many key events when our teams – he's a Manchester City fan – had played each other over the years. Those shared reference points contribute to

my enjoyment of his writing, but it's the forensic approach and the understanding of the business side of the game that really marks his writing out. Combine that with an evident pride in the game's folk roots and a controlled passion that skewers those who would abuse it, and you see why Conn is one of the finest football writers of the modern age. His books *The Beautiful Game* and *Richer Than God* are required reading, and he has covered almost every major issue in English football in the last 20 years, pretty much inventing the modern style of investigative football reporting. And his daily reports from the Hillsborough enquiry are as good an example of the traditional craft of journalism as you are likely to see.

## **5. Julie Welch**

Julie Welch is a true legend. The first woman to work as a football reporter for a UK national newspaper, a middle-class woman in a working class man's environment, she carved a name for herself in tough circumstances. After years of what she once described as "watching football and eating bad food in service stations" she went on to write about running, taking up marathon running herself and continuing to run not only the 26.2 but also ultras (that's 100 mile runs to you and me) in her 60s. She loves sport, but she's interested in people, and her book on the life-transforming effects of the London Marathon, 26.2, really demonstrates that. She's also a successful playwright, her best-known work being the semi-autobiographical *Those Glory Glory Nights*. In that, she displays her affection for

the 1961 Spurs Double winning team that hooked her on the game and were, without doubt, the greatest club side ever. A few years ago she helped Rob White, son of the Double side's winger John White – killed by lightening when Rob was still in a pram – write a moving account of his quest to come to terms with his father's legacy. I was lucky enough to meet her while working on a project for Spurs a few years ago, and we remain friends, her infectious enthusiasm for people always an inspiration. She also got me into running, and on occasional trips to White Hart Lane her take on the game she's watched for years is still an education.

## **6. Amy Lawrence**

Despite supporting the wrong north London team, Amy Lawrence remains one of my favourite football writers. That's partly because of a sense of her being 'one of us' – Amy started out writing on *The Gooner* fanzine at the same time a number of us were plying our trade in the DIY culture of the late 1980s. But it's also because she writes fluently about the game in a way that is extremely difficult to do – conveying the passion without straying into hyperbole or frenzy. So many sports writers feel they need to prove a point, but Lawrence just sets out the story. That doesn't mean she doesn't have a point of view, but as any admirer of Arsene Wenger would tell you, it's the delivery that counts. What's also clear from her writing, and absent from many other top writers' work, is an appreciation and understanding of the fans' perspective. Lawrence is a fan

who got her ideal job, and that's something to treasure.

## 7. David Goldblatt

Few football writers have the political, economic and cultural literacy of David Goldblatt. He deals with the game in its fullness, peeling back the hype and the self importance to remind us of its complex simplicity, of why it reaches deep into the soul of so many of us who are utterly hooked. His gaze is global, his writing covering the sport in places as far flung as Kenya and Denmark, Brazil and Assyria, his analysis heavily sociological, and he's got a lyrical turn of phrase that takes the reader by the hand and leads through sometimes complex argument with aplomb. A typical observation is that "in our otherwise depoliticised, individualised and over-planned world, there is somewhere where large crowds can reinvent their own identities". His history of world football is not only epic, it has the perfect title for such a book – *The Ball Is Round*. His latest book, *Games of Our Lives: The Making and Meaning of English Football*, is not only a wonderful, sweeping read, it is an essential contribution to the discussion about what is happening to the sport I love.