



No Hunger In Paradise: The Players. The Journey. The Dream

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This is the third part in Mike Calvin's football book trilogy. First he wrote about scouts in The Nowhere Men. Next he wrote about the pressures of managers in Living on the Volcano. Now he writes about the players themselves, in his biggest and most ambitious book yet.

Based on hundreds of hours of interviews, *No Hunger in Paradise* is the definitive book on what it takes to make it as a professional footballer in this country, and the pitfalls, pressures and casualties along the way.

From visiting gangs in council estates in Brixton which have produced England internationals, to 200 million training complexes in Manchester, which only breed jealousy and entitlement, Mike follows the stories of the most promising young players up and down the country. He also interviews parents, coaches, agents and top managers and players to get an overall picture of the system, which is rife with corruption and abuse.

No Hunger in Paradise is full of powerful human stories: of the youngsters who fall through the cracks and of those who fall prey to the entitlement and distraction of money. But in the vein of Gladwell's *Outliers*, he also explores the inspirational stories of grit and of success, and attempts to find out what common traits unite the rare individuals who 'make it'.

No Hunger In Paradise: The Players. The Journey. The Dream Details

Date : Published April 20th 2017 by Century

ISBN : 9781780896908

Author : Michael Calvin

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : Football, Nonfiction, Sports and Games, Sports, Soccer, Psychology, Childrens



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From Reader Review No Hunger In Paradise: The Players. The Journey. The Dream for online ebook

Ruben Borger says

An unnerving account of goings on in the youth department of "The Beautiful Game".

Neal says

Very good book. Stories can get a bit repetitive but it's funny an emotive read.

Mahlon says

A penetrating look at the commoditization of youth football in England and it's effects on the long-term mental health of players and their families. Executed with Calvin's trademark thoroughness.

Steve says

Both depressing and uplifting at different times, this well written book covers the work of football academies, and tells many stories of kids not making it, and the suffering for them and their families. Knowing someone who works in the system I know there is good work being done, but Calvin seems to be coming at the situation from a negative starting point, which colours his viewpoint.

Fredrik Reis says

Mycket bra om ungdomsfotboll, framförallt kring hur den engelska akademivärlden "fungerar". En hel del att ta med sig kring de större etiska och moraliska frågorna både som förälder och som ledare.

Mario says

A revealing look into the world of youth football in England and the way children are used as nothing more than pawns that are chewed up and spit out and when they're no longer needed. Although things are beginning to change on that count as certain coaches and mentors realise that they need to prepare these kids for a life after football as the vast majority never have a career in the game.

Michael Calvin really is a fine, investigative football writer.

Mark Colley says

Another excellent Michael Calvin book

Every parent of an aspiring young footballer should read this book about the cut throat business of British professional football, it will give them a clearer mind of what to expect or not to expect, too many parents have stars in their own eyes living their dreams through their children. Michael Calvin as per usual covers everything about the ruthless unforgiving world of the beautiful game that spits out and deserts more youngsters, than are successful, but initially sell them the ultimate dream.

A must read.

Tom says

Calvin has an engaging turn of phrase with a keen sense of irony and metaphor: "He failed to feel the love from Alain Casanova, the former Toulouse manager."

Unlike so many football writers who have to get their pinion in, he lets his subjects tell their stories in their own words. Best of all for me, he spots the telling details - mottos, acts of humanity and conversations that make a difference and are worth recounting to make a point stronger and more memorable.

He's a fine observer of body language - of players, parents and interviewees - and there's a great interview with Gareth Southgate that could have been made irrelevant by his rapid promotion to England manager just days later - instead Calvin makes some telling points about the England manager's philosophy and character.

He'll find the coach whose words cut through the bureaucracy and provide the reader with hope, at least, that there's a better way that has at least some representation in today's football.

Recurring problems emerge: clubs recruiting kids far too young, elite coaching plans that are all about the plan and not the elite, jobsworth coaches and scouts interested more in advancing their own career than the duty of care that their career, done properly, should include.

Among his interviews are some respected coaches, past, present and future and there are some fine words from Steve Heighway, Paul Hart and Dave Parnaby in particular. The coaches' words or the author's also feature plenty of up-and-coming players with a bit of background and character information, which will make watching them more interesting through the coming season.

Karen Ross says

Fascinating

Martin Vickers says

?Michael Calvin has profiled the scouts then the managers and now it is the turn of the football academies.

The shiny makers and breakers of young boys dreams and hearts. The title promises a book about how the money flooding youth football is causing a lack of motivation that is needed to keep developing to get to the highest level. While in some ways this is true the book reveals a more complex situation with a lot of the criticism aimed at the Premier League clubs for fighting for taking in far too many kids and dropping them whenever the whim suits them with no thought as to the devastation that causes the boy and his family, Calvin does a great job of explaining just how difficult it is for a boy to make it, how much of a sacrifice to a normal childhood they are expected to make and what happens when the dreaded news comes. From lower league football to scholarships in the US to a life behind bars.

Calvin also looks at the agents who have become more and more attracted to the youth because of the money. The lack of regulation, the illegal approaches to parents and clubs. It is enough to be thankful that neither of my lads had to endure life in an academy chasing the dream which for almost everyone ends up remaining just that and required reading for any parent in that journey.

Kahn says

Michael Calvin has, deservedly so, made quite a name for himself writing about the beautiful game.

His insight and engaging prose combine brilliantly to make potentially dry subjects fascinating.

So it was no small joy to find *No Hunger In Paradise* appearing at the top of the old 'to read' list.

Sadly, on this occasion, Calvin seems to have taken on a subject that's just a bit too big for a single tome. With *Living On The Volcano*, where Calvin looked at the pressure managers find themselves under, each chapter dealt succinctly with each boss and dovetailed into the next tale smoothly.

Here, however, the youth system of the modern game is just a tad too complex and strewn with stars and those who have failed to make the grade.

It starts off well enough, looking at inner-city youth schemes which have produced the likes of Nathaniel Clyne and provide hope for youngsters keen to get out of the gang culture that is becoming so prevalent. Sadly, after that, Calvin seems to lose his way.

We zip between the top-tier academy system, through agents, across the lower leagues, swing by parents and steam past the FA's much ballyhooed centre of excellence.

But it's hard for one chapter to focus on one thing, meaning that within 30/40 pages up to four or five tales are being loosely entwined.

And it gets hard to keep track of just who is who.

What is clear from in book is that Calvin thinks the whole system needs refining and regulating - that the current free-for-all is doing more harm than good.

And it's clear that he cares very much about this, which is why every tale he uncovered has to be told.

Sadly what was needed was a finer toothcomb, or one area (say agents) in detail. Instead the reader is left with the feeling of a whole bag of balls being let loose on their head.

Sunny says

This book was turned into a football documentary and is incredibly eye opening. I have 2 boys who are both play football and at fairly competitive levels and the professional academy system would be a big step up for them and a ruthless one at that.

Parents are lured into pushing their children into dreams of becoming a footballer for all the wrong reasons. This is a very lucrative industry and now that academies are going after kids from younger and younger ages

its becoming hostile and super aggressive. You would need to have very thick skin both as an adult and sometimes as a child to be successful. I ultimately learnt a great deal about what it would take to be successful in the youth academy system, but you can tell that the book only reveals the tip of the iceberg. Which is a scary thought. Having said all that .. if you are able to keep focussed and work uber hard and stay away from the Benjamins and the lure of mammon, especially at some of the young ages the book talks about then I believe that it's not as impossible as the book makes out. The sine qua non read of the academy system in the UK if you have a child that is playing for an academy system professional club. Here are some of my best bits:

- Messi's visualisation of opportunity and the adhesive control that testified to hours of selfless, solitary practise.
- The spirit of the group tends to be inversely proportional to the quality of the facilities. I see boys and staff working their nuts off in a normal environment. I see teenagers who are excellently educated, very polite, but there is very little going on behind their eyes. The word that springs to mind is robotic. It seems they are on a treadmill and they do everything unquestioningly.
- I went to see one argentine player who was really down in the dumps. He tried to explain to me that he felt that he was being bullied because of the size of his head. He said that the players were calling him melon because he had a big head. I was looking at him and I thought if anything his head was quite small. I couldn't understand it. When I investigated it his friends were shouting "man on".
- I know you've got your career plan and your dreams, but did anyone train better than you did today? And if they go, I don't know, I didn't really think about it. I tell them to start thinking about it. Don't let it happen again. If you trained well on Monday don't celebrate it on Tuesday. Do it again because that's what top players do.
- The best players the best sportsmen, use their environment to make themselves. Those who have the silver spoon, the rich ones who have the best gym and the best nutrition, will use those advantages.
- Black encourages him to dissect his matches into 5-minute segments to guard against the magnification of any mistakes. A mental device to consign any errors into the past as soon as practically possible.
- There's no such things are winter breaks or Christmas and Easter holidays in football. There are no half terms either. Do you want to be a footballer or go on holiday?
- Somewhere down the line you are not getting the best. You are perpetuating the averageness.
- Everyone can play badly or make a mistake, but what do you do in a game after that? If you get the ball keep it, pass it to the same coloured shirt. Do you feel better? Yeah good. That's how you build a game. Do the simple things. Go back to basics. Third game you are back on the blob. You never get dropped. It is not the manager who gives you confidence. It is you. I always ask my players, who picks the team? Ah you gaffer! No. you do. Players pick the teams.
- There's a saying that talent needs models, not criticism.
- Steve also used to talk to me about the best having a poorly developed sense of fear. That's the crux of it. Do we encourage fear, massage it? No we eradicate it while maintain the mentality that you want to be the best every single day. Very few have that trait.
- Why do the greatest players produce the greatest moments at the most pivotal times. Because they have seen it. Biomechanically they know they can achieve it. Their technique stays the same in the most fearful moments.
- Steve used to liken striking a ball to a boxer throwing a punch. It wasn't thrown through his fist. It was thrown with his heart and his head which allowed the shoulder, the elbow, the extension of the wrist and forearm, and finally the fist to channel the power.
- When your face is not smiling your feet are not smiling.
- James joined the Southampton academy at 7 and maintained a call and response routine with his father well into adolescence. What are we here for? His father would ask him, in a ritual enacted whenever he dropped him off at training. Enjoyment was the obligatory reply.
- Hard work beats talent if talent doesn't work hard.

- The defining factor in a successful pro is mentality. When a player comes into a club you're assuming he is at a high level technically but there is something very important about the ability to learn, to keep wanting to learn and improve. It's about dealing with the constant setbacks and constant need to adapt and adjust.
 - You never stop learning. The fact is that if you think you've stopped leaning your career is over. Mental toughness to me is your ability to keep doing what you are supposed to be doing regardless of the situation. High level sport is uncomfortable. We try to teach players to be comfortable at being uncomfortable.
 - Data from military and sporting resources to support his theory that the quality of an athletes eye movement determines performance at the highest level. The brain operates by planning 2.5 seconds into the future. It is constantly assessing its environment in anticipation of what is about to happen.
 - We operated on the slogan that if you wanted to be extreme you had to go extreme.
 - But it is not enough to be positive. At some point you have to make a decision to stick to your character and become the person you want to be or just accept being like everyone else.
 - He slept between nine-ish in the evening and midnight cleaned offices until 7:30 am and then left south London to attend lectures in leister until mid-afternoon. He then completed a 280-mile round trip and returned to Streatham where he studied in a local library for another 4 hours or so.
 - As albert Einstein insisted “logic will get you from a to b: imagination will get you everywhere.
 - City's U10, U11, and U13s were national champions in the 2015-16 season, the U11 defeating QPR 29-1 in the final fixture. The U15s won the national floodlit cup and the U16s were undefeated.
 - City's academy squad are taught to cook and put through bronze and silver levels of the D of E award scheme. Perspective is served through serving at a soup kitchen or playing on crutches and losing heavily to the clubs amputee team ... to guard against the dangers of excessively early specialisation, boys undertake alternative activities like boxing, canoeing, judo, Pilates, yoga and free running.
 - It's about instant context, so we talk about refuelling the food as topping up the battery on your cell phone. You recharge, revitalise, re-energise. If we delivered the same message using carbohydrates , proteins and minerals it would put the child to sleep.
 - Ten defining values of marine commandos were: courage, unity, determination, adaptability, unselfishness, humility, cheerfulness, professionalism, fortitude and humour.
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Brendan Crowley says

Michael Calvin's recent trilogy of books have established him as the great chronicler of modern British football. He investigates the human stories of English football, shining a light on the real life experiences of those for whom the game is their actual or potential livelihood.

No Hunger in Paradise follows on from Living on the Volcano which focused on managers and The Nowhere Men which examined scouts. This time it is youth football that is under the spotlight.

This is an important book which shines a light on a system which fundamentally fails thousands of children. Calvin interviews a wide range of people – from coaches and agents to parents and players. Many of the chapters would make excellent stand alone stories – combined, they paint a depressing portrait of an industry in which children are seen as assets and often quickly discarded when they lose their perceived value.

Calvin, a very experienced journalist, is clearly a very talented interviewer who draws out the complexity of the stories of those he speaks to. His own voice in the book is mainly one of empathy – its clear he cares passionately about the game and the people he meets. Calvin also made a documentary with BT Sport based on his book which is well worth checking out.

The most striking fact presented is the young age at which players start to be recruited – Calvin repeatedly paints scenes that seem normal for adults or teenagers until he explains the players are 6 or 7 years old. More than anything, if the book has a central thesis, it's that this chasing of players at a younger and younger age is fundamentally wrong.

There is also an interesting contrast between old school and new school ways of thinking about youth coaching. While better processes and procedures are undoubtedly important and necessary for safeguarding, you get a sense that Calvin and many of his interviewees feel the use of technology for technology's sake hasn't necessarily improved coaching outcomes.

While Calvin's writing is very readable, this is not an easy read. Calvin constantly, rightly, reminds the reader of the problems in the game. The book focuses on the good guys in a bad industry. Calvin highlights the good work done by many clubs, organisations and coaches who he sees as role models for how things could be improved across football.

At a time when there have been so much coverage of historic abuse within English football, reading this book you cannot help feeling that the football authorities in England have gotten their priorities all wrong. Welfare must come first and outcomes second. With the scale of money involved, it's unlikely that message will be heard anytime soon. Large scale change has proven possible when designed to improve the English national team – whether it could again prove possible when designed to help those who ultimately don't make the grade remains to be seen.

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James says

This wasn't quite *The Nowhere Men* but Michael Calvin is still very adept at really bringing the training pitch to life, in this case focusing on youth football, and in a slightly less neutral tone than his previous books. He also includes interviews with more senior figures which gives this an extra air of legitimacy.

The chapters are set up like his previous books, in which he interviews a figure involved in the game (from parents, to youth coaches, co-director of football, academy heads and Gareth Southgate) for a chapter to illustrate an aspect of the industry. As with his book on scouting, Calvin himself has more to say on each topic, both implicitly and explicitly, although I did feel this one meandered through his subjects a bit.

The other issue is that Calvin never really challenges his interviewee, enabling every figure involved to blame someone else. Those in charge at Brentford would love to run it differently, but can't. The academy head would love to run it differently, but can't. The good agents and youth coaches would love it if only the bad agents would go away. The parents featured are always hardworking and care for their sons but youth coaches are sick of pushy parents who take it too seriously. It's always someone else's fault, even when most sides are given their right of reply - presumably, the evil ones were unavailable for interview. To this reader, it leaves you with the impression that the game is just full of self-interested parties whose respective interests aren't aligned with each other.

That's not to say I'm unsympathetic to the general view that these are kids, and are being used as the clubs know the majority won't make it. And what Calvin excels at is taking an issue in a way that tends not to make it into the sports pages, but is still compelling reading. I'm sure he must paraphrase most quotes

because they are often quite similar in style, punchy and efficient with words, but this means that 400 pages isn't too long because he knows what he's doing.
