



How Not to Be a Professional Footballer

Paul Merson

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An anecdote-driven narrative of the classic footballer's 'DOs and DO NOTs' from the ever-popular Arsenal legend and football pundit Paul Merson, aka 'The Merse'.

When it comes to advice on the pitfalls of life as a professional footballer, Paul Merson can pretty much write the manual. In fact, that's exactly what he's done in this hilarious new book which manages to be simultaneously poignant and gloriously funny.

Merson was a prodigiously talented footballer in the 80s and 90s, gracing the upper echelons of the game - and the tabloid front pages - with his breathtakingly skills and larger-than-life off-field persona.

His much-publicised battles with gambling, drug and alcohol addiction are behind him now, and football fans continue to be drawn to his sharp footballing brain and playful antics on SkySports cult results show Soccer Saturday.

The book delights and entertains with a treasure chest of terrific anecdotes from a man who has never lost his love of football and his inimitable joie de vivre through a 25-year association with the Beautiful Game.

The DO NOTs include:

DO NOT adopt 'Champagne' Charlie Nicholas as your mentor

DO NOT share a house with Gazza

DO NOT regularly place £30,000 bets at the bookie's

DO NOT get so drunk that you can't remember the 90 minutes of football you just played in

DO NOT manage Walsall (at any cost)

How Not to be a Professional Footballer is a hugely entertaining, moving and laugh-out-loud funny story.

How Not to Be a Professional Footballer Details

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From Reader Review How Not to Be a Professional Footballer for online ebook

Michelle says

I think we've established that I was a weird child. While my peers were into New Kids on the Block, I was into football (back in the days when it was still rough and players weren't prima donnas). And the pin-up on my wall, my dream hunk and the man I wanted to marry, was Paul Merson.

early 90s swoon

Based on this book, I'm glad I didn't. I remember being at the front of the North Bank at Arsenal one time, and as Merson came over for a corner someone in the crowd behind shouted, "Are you going out for a drink tonight, Merse?" He pulled an amusing 'of course' kind of face in response. Someone else then shouted, "Can you drink as much as Steve Bould, Merse?" to which he shook his head and again, we all laughed. But reading this, I see now that at the time we were laughing - and he was laughing along too - but he was in the midst of a serious problem (illness?) that would cost him £7m. Yikes. I'm glad 14 year-old me didn't know that - it would've shattered my illusions, and what would've I have day-dreamed about during GSCE geography if it weren't for Merse?

I was too shocked by it to find it funny (as most people have). Addiction is a scary, scary thing, and as my brain isn't wired that way I find it hard to understand. It's a very honest book though, so I applaud him for that. I could've done without all the slang, which grates after a while.

Abhinav Neelam says

Paul Merson takes all your expectations about how messed up one person's life can get and throws them right out of the window. It's incredible how much of a start contrast to his on field successes that his off field shenanigans were; thankfully Merse spends more time on those off field stories ;-)

I didn't rate this one higher because despite the fascinating stories, Merse's limitations as a writer start to jar once you get used to the initially novel language - thoroughly out of place euphemisms occasionally studding the otherwise erm.. full blooded descriptions being one aspect of it.

Still, as an Arsenal fan I loved his insights into the George Graham era, and the little anecdotes involving the famed back four of Bould, Adams, Winterburn and Dixon. (You'll never see them the same way again.) I absolutely adored his liberal and utterly careless use of hyperbole everywhere. I can't deny that the man has a cracking sense of humour.

Also, the sense that it's a sober and chastened Paul Merson who's (still around and) looking back at the past with a sardonic smile on his face is what makes the miserable happenings in his life that we're reading easy to swallow (and laugh at).

All in all, a very decent read!

Peter says

Great insight into a personality that has become one of the nation's favourites of a Saturday afternoon. Read it in a night so clearly a must have for anyone looking to pick up some light reading that you can really sink your teeth into. Essential reading for any football fan born in or of the 1990s as it explores every avenue imaginable; sex, drugs, monumental boozing, gambling and some football as well.

One of the most enjoyable books I've read in a long time and this is from an avid Hermann Hesse fan so were it lacks in artistic credibility it certainly picks up in character, plus being a gooner never hurts either.

Jacquie Jerrard says

Complete nutter

merson did loads of bad stuff, but he was also a talented footballer, having a addictive personality meant he couldn't stop when started. This is one of the saddest but funniest books, he reminds me of a kid wanting everything in the toy store. It is a book for footie fans who understand the pressure of the game, and the pitfalls and prizes that come with it.

Mike says

My team, Middlesbrough, signed Paul Merson when we got relegated in 1997. A direct replacement for Juninho, it quickly became apparent that Merse had a fraction of the Little Fella's silky skill, but bagging an Arsenal footballer with league titles under his belt was nevertheless exciting, and he definitely played a big part in getting us promoted. When he moved on, to Aston Villa the following season, it was acrimonious because their manager John Gregory was such a dislikeable chap and it felt like the player had been tapped up, but mainly I think because we'd grown to love Merse and didn't want him to go.

What was less well known about him, though it had been all over the tabloids, was his close relationship with the booze, the bookies and the coke, or at least the extent of his addiction. Knowing that, in hindsight the player's decision to move to Boro and work for a renowned lad's lad like Bryan Robson was probably not the best, compounded by the later signing of Paul Gascoigne and, to top it all off, getting the pair to share a house. The story of how Merson made it through his year and a bit at the Riverside, giving in to temptation far too often, is covered here in frank detail. What's worse are the impressions he had of the set-up, the contrast with Arsenal that showed just how a genuinely big club operated against the 'suck it and see' approach adopted by Robson.

Elsewhere, what I like about the book is the colloquial style, the number of sentences that start with 'Mate' or 'Oh my God', as though Merse is at the bar, telling us his story in person rather than on the page. There's no attempt at literary thrills, just a lad chatting about episodes from his life in a way that's tinged with regret though never apologetic. Merson's someone who knows he had what most of us can only dream of possessing and pissed it away. The anecdotes are laddish, rarely genuinely funny and occasionally very dangerous, such as the 'red wine sleeping pills' game he's encouraged to play with Gazza, but then tales of drinking constantly to excess and chucking thousands on the gees are never really meant to be humorous, are they?

There are some smart observations about life at Arsenal, his love for George Graham - I hesitate to use the word 'respect' because it seems the manager tried to rebuke Merson for his antics many times and it was never a lesson that was learned. It's nice also to find someone who had time and good things to say for Glenn Hoddle's time as England manager, not to mention Eileen Drewery and her 'healing hands.'

The impression I'm left with is of someone who hasn't really learned a thing from his experiences, apart from where Charlie's concerned thank goodness, and there's actually something rather refreshing about that. I couldn't blame him if he lamented the lost millions, the element of wasted talent and messing up the chances he was given, but instead Merse blames no one, cites it all as the product of personality flaws and lives to fight another day. At the end of the book, I liked him a lot more than before I picked it up.

Peter Wanless says

A very funny book (with serious undertones in terms of the dangers of addiction) - many memorable anecdotes all read to me by Wanless Jr each night over the last few weeks.

Mark says

Paul Merson's choice of title and picture depicts the contents of his book very well. Merson was definitely not a Bobby Charlton model professional and this book tells you how far away from that he was! Funny and well worth a read for anyone who misses the characters that football used to produce before it became so serious.

Jim says

Very entertaining, even if you're not that into football. Merson is unsparing on himself when it comes to his addictions of both gambling and booze, but the book is written from a distance. He describes what he goes through and what type of person that he is, but this is no trip into a Heart of Darkness. You leave the book thinking yes, he had it tough, but he actually quite enjoyed the ride. And there's one glaring omission in this tale of gambling, wine, women and song - the women. Apart from his wives, he clearly never met any others. Right. It makes you wonder what else is being glossed over?

Simon Jones says

'How Not to Be a Professional Footballer' is a bit of a mixed bag. Or, to use a Mersonism, a bag of Revels.

The criticisms: the tales of drunkenness are boring (and there are a lot of them). Anecdotes about footballers getting drunk are no more interesting than anecdotes about electricians getting drunk. In addition, it feels like there are omissions from this book. Women, for instance. We learn the names of Merson's two ex-wives and that they left him due to his addictions and that's it. Are we seriously to believe that no women ever threw themselves at an Arsenal and England footballer when he was out boozing? Was he never tempted? This book is a 99.99% male environment and weaker for it.

The strengths: the chapters about Merson's gambling and drug addictions and subsequent rehab are eye-opening and startling, precisely because they're original and revelatory. Although Merson has done plenty of stupid, ridiculous things, you warm to him because he admits to his weaknesses. His therapist in rehab tells him, 'You are without doubt the most pathological gambler we've ever had come through here'. In a number of ways, he's lucky to be alive.

After reading this book, I felt like I'd had a chat with Paul Merson and he'd told me most of his darkest secrets. I sincerely hope he's happy and healthy in his life right now.

Paul says

Real eye opener. Very funny and a good insight into the world of a 90s/00s footballer. Tells the story of how you can have everything, just for an addiction to rip it all away.

James Walton says

An easy to read humorous book giving another side to life as a footballer.

Paul is honest and open and lets you into his world. He is not glorifying his actions, simply telling it how it is.

Although I'm not a 'Gooner' I could relate to many of Paul's stories as I grew up watching football during the times he is talking about. His point of view adds a layer to those times. Even if you didn't follow football at that time this book would make you giggle - you may not believe some of the characters and stories!!!

I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it to any child of the 80's/90's (showing my age there!)

Carla says

This was an entertaining and eye-opening read. I am very shocked but pleased that Paul Merson survived to tell the tale but I hope he has now found a way to enjoy his life without the binges and gambling. I am very fond of him and want to hear his pronunciations on Soccer Saturday and Fantasy Football for years to come.

mr j w gillie says

A good laugh

As an Arsenal fan of the same age as Merse, I found the book related to my growing up with Arsenal. Great names in the book also to prod the memory.

Mrs J Thompson says

Excellent book with some really funny memories

The book was written in a frank manner with nothing held back, unlike some others I have read in the past where they have lied to make themselves look better.

Some of the tales from Merse's career were very amusing indeed. Well worth a read and I really appreciate his honesty.

Doreen says

Absolutely cracking depiction of the lifestyle of a professional English footballer in and around the 1990s. Paul Merson is an Arsenal legend whose off-the-field antics were just as noteworthy as his sporting accomplishments, tho perhaps in a far different context. Merse is a larger than life figure who was as well known for his ebullient personality as for his skill. Fewer, at the time, had any notion of his problems with drinking, drugs and gambling. To his credit, he came to realize that these were addictions and voluntarily sought help: this book is as much a cautionary tale promoting addiction awareness as it is a hilarious behind-the-scenes look at his storied career.

In all honesty, Merse had already left Arsenal by the time I (finally, belatedly) became interested in the game, so he was always a part of my team's history and not my reality. This book does a great job of making me feel a greater connection to his role as an Arsenal man, as well as the club's pre-Wenger history. I actually bought this book for myself and the bff when it went on sale around Christmastime last year, but hadn't had time to read it till Arsene's announcement of resignation on 4/20 made that date a perpetual day of mourning in my household. Finally picking up *How Not To Be A Professional Footballer* to read in the wake of it was a lovely way to cheer myself up. Because, first and foremost, this book is hilarious. Granted, if you're not interested in English football, some of the references might fly right on by, but I hung on every piece of Arsenal gossip that graced the pages (tho that caffeine pill! Yikes!) I also really enjoyed Merse's blunt but never ungenerous depictions of the people around him, as well as his honesty in depicting his own shortcomings. He's a remarkably brave man for exposing himself the way he does here, and I admire him all the more for it.

HNTBAPF might not be as celebrated a book as other sports biographies but it's a must-read for Gooners and for any sports fans who enjoy a healthy dose of humor with their sport. I'm just grateful I had a chance to get to know an Arsenal legend better, to help incorporate more of my club's proud and gracious history into my present.
