

WILLIAM LAI

FOOTBALL

DARK ARTS



Every Crafty Trick in the Book From
Time-Wasting Tactics to Devilish Deceptions



Illustrated by Jojo Chin

MEYER & MEYER SPORT

Football Dark Arts

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FOREWORD

I was asked to write a foreword to this book because I am known to be opinionated on the subject of ethics in sport, and football in particular.

By way of background, I grew up in a different time and place, which of course has shaped my personal values and philosophy. As a young kid in England, my main sport was cricket, a sport that, as etymologists will know, generated the phrase, *'it's just not cricket'* to describe any behaviour or attitude that falls below the expected norms of decency. My parents instilled in me a sense that there are only two ways to do something – the right way and the wrong way.

Everything was black or white. That is why I was, and remain, disgusted by Diego Maradona's so-called *'hand of God'* (which should have been *'hand of the devil'* in my opinion). I still find it abhorrent when somebody cheats at sport under any circumstances. So that is my unambiguous starting point.

However, I recognize that my views will appear quaint, quirky, and old-fashioned to many. I also know that events and actions in football are not always black and white. Indeed many of the 'laws' are open to interpretation.

There is often a thin line separating staying within the laws (bending them) and breaking them. With so much at stake now in terms of money, jobs, reputation, and prestige, it is not surprising that people will seek any form of competitive advantage.

This book and its clever use of examples illustrate how to do this. I have to say that some examples are more legitimate than others, but whether they are technically cheating or not, the point is that they

are undoubtedly part of the game. Thus, whether you are trying to implement them or stop them, it is valid to learn about them.

One of my biggest bugbears is *'time-wasting'*. It is time to unburden my soul. To my undying shame, I was once guilty of this myself when in the semi-final of the Cheshire veterans Cup, and while winning 1-0 in added time, I *'hoofed'* the ball as far as I could out of play to delay the other team taking the throw-in. We won that match and went on to win the final, and whilst to some my negative contribution was ultimately justified, I still regret it because *'it's just not cricket'*.

I hate it when a substituted player meanders off the pitch at a pace slower than a walk to wind down the clock. This and all of the other time-wasting initiatives cited in the book could be solved at a stroke by using the 'stopwatch' system. It works perfectly well in other sports such as basketball and rugby as well as in football's sister sport, futsal. I implore IFAB to introduce it.

It is salutary to learn that experiments have shown that the ball is in play only around 60 minutes during a 90-minute match. We're all being short-changed more so when the dark arts are being performed.

So whilst I can't say I agree with the dark arts of football, I agree that, like it or not, they are part of our game. In this context I refuse to call it our *'beautiful'* game, but if you are involved in football in any capacity, it is as well to know about the dark arts, to recognize them, and to understand them.

For these reasons I commend this book to you.

Mark Sutcliffe, CEO
Hong Kong Football Association

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I am grateful to my students, my referee friends, my academic colleagues, new and lifelong friends, and everyone involved in the game from professionals to amateurs, and at the international and domestic levels.

Finally, I am forever grateful to my family for their support, guidance, and counsel.

INTRODUCTION

Dark arts are negative actions, either physical or psychological, that intentionally disadvantage opponents.

Everyone who watches football knows that players have always been told to play in a sporting manner. *"Play hard but play fair; Be a good sport."* We are taught to respect and shake hands with our opponents.

Yet when we see teams perform the FIFA Handshake, which officially promotes peace and fair play, and then over the following 90 minutes observe the huge torrent of cunning chicanery, rascally ruses, verbal sparring, and wily one-upmanship carried out by players and coaches on their opponents and toward match officials, it makes you wonder what is really going on out there on the pitch, on the sidelines, and in the dressing rooms.

During the match, there is much disdain for opponents, including provocation, intimidation, deliberate interruption, foul language, and other unmannerly actions and behaviours that have traditionally been censored, downplayed, and swiftly dismissed by the media and authorities. For their own reasons, the mainstream stakeholders prefer to focus primarily on the positive and sporting aspects of *the Beautiful Game*.

Officially, the dark arts are not taught, and there are no books from the football authorities that discuss or raise awareness of the dark arts. In contrast, there are plenty of manuals and online videos on soccer drills and fancy skills that promote the "beauty" in *the*

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Beautiful Game. And there are of course official rulebooks and regulations that tell everyone how they must play (i.e. with fairness and integrity). But in reality, players hardly ever read the rulebooks, which are revised and released annually by the International Football Association Board (IFAB).

Yet everyone knows players dive, deceive, and double-cross in their attempt to outwit the referees and circumvent the rules. How are the negative and dirty aspects of the game taught? Players must learn the dark arts somehow and from somewhere. But there are no official manuals to teach players how to con their way to winning. And no manager, coach, or football club would ever openly admit to teaching immoral actions and using the dark arts.

Players learn about football's dark arts in exactly the same way they learn about the rules of the game. Intuition. Players spend time observing (and being duped by) successful and experienced master practitioners of the dark arts, and then they imitate the experts and hone their negative skills.

This book is the first detailed collection of its kind, revealing unofficial tricks and gamesmanship that professional players have intuitively learned since they first took to the training pitch as bright-eyed, innocent, junior players.

If you want to bend the rules and gain a winning edge over your opponents, this book's comprehensive collection of dark arts will help you. Also, if you want to understand the tricks and avoid being duped, then this book will be invaluable for you and your teammates.

This book deals with two main categories of dark arts: time-wasting and deception tactics. There is a third category dealing with how to

collect cautions without causing harm to opponents or obtaining self-inflicted injuries.

Time-wasting is basically the use of unsporting methods to delay or slow down the game. Its aim is to give opponents fewer opportunities to play and hence score. There are **25 top tricks** for time-wasting.

Deception tactics are unsporting actions used to scam opponents and hoodwink match officials without getting caught and penalised. This section has **30 mischievous methods** for deceiving opponents and match officials.

The third section will help players choose the best option to deliberately obtain yellow cards should they "need" to. Without any knowledge or clear instructions about how to pick up a yellow card, players can fail spectacularly. They usually end up badly hacking down an opponent—sometimes inadvertently injuring themselves in the process—and being sent off instead of getting the intended caution. This section has **25 mellow ways** to get yellow cards without requiring players to recklessly tackle an opponent.

Never before have so many dark arts in football been collected and published. Altogether there are 80 ruses here for your perusal. The dark arts can give you and your team the slightest of winning edges, which in the modern game is all that separates winners from losers.

A little note to readers in the US: The term "football" refers to the sport "Association Football", which was established and first standardized by a group of privately schooled young gentlemen in 1863 and affectionately abbreviated by their peers as "assoccer" (in the same fashion English schoolboys used "rugger" for "Rugby Football"). This is why association football eventually became known as "soccer".

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The first unwritten rule in football that every player learns is **never ever retrieve the ball for your opponents.**

It is learned intuitively when players, as young as 7 or 8 years old, first realize they can be made a "*chump*" or "*patsy*" (i.e. taken advantage of) if they help fetch the ball for their opponent. This first unwritten rule in football opens the path to the dark side.

By not retrieving the ball for opponents, players learn that this natural delay gives them time to catch their breath and get back into position in time for the restart. When it is the opponents' responsibility to restart the game, it is not unfair to leave the ball for them to retrieve themselves.

In itself, not retrieving the ball for opponents is not a dark art. It can be considered innocuous and "*fair game*" since this passive action is a harmless gesture, which does not actively disadvantage opponents.

However, from this basic concept comes time-wasting where players who concede a restart (like a free kick, goal kick, corner kick or a throw in) will intentionally feign to retrieve or pretend to stop a moving ball for an opponent, and then at the last moment will quickly "*change their mind about helping*" (see **TW1 False Fetch**). This is the beginning of the dark arts, where there is active intent to deceive the opponent.

From time-wasting, other dirty tricks developed that deliberately exploit weaknesses or ignorance in opponents. These tricks include provoking, intimidating and gaining an unfair advantage over opponents.

To recognise the dark arts, it is necessary to observe many of these unsavoury incidents in action. Watch online video compilations by searching for *"crazy football fights"*, *"El Clasico fights, fouls, red cards"*, and *"dirty Chelsea Tottenham 2016 fights fouls"*. Such videos demonstrate the time-wasting and devious deceptions that abound in the game and are described in this book.

A Special Understanding of the Game



José Mourinho

Love him or loathe him, José Mourinho, one the most charismatic and controversial managers in football, is a master of the dark arts.

He is an example of many stakeholders in the game who possess a pragmatic and cynical approach, which encourages an understanding and the use of the dark arts. On many occasions, Mourinho has publicly lost patience with the likes of club directors, players, medical personnel, agents, and sports journalists. This is because they lack that special understanding of the game.

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In Mourinho's world, this special cynical understanding cannot be taught formally or officially. This also explains why he, and other astute and demanding managers, do not always get along with decisions made by match officials and competition administrators since officials and administrators tend to go *by the book* (i.e. they follow the official Laws of the Game and competition regulations), whereas managers and players consistently attempt to bend the rules to their own advantage.

These managers much prefer observant individuals in the game who are crafty and street smart, know how others get away with bending the rules, and who do not boast about and show off using the darks arts themselves. So when people around Mourinho *"don't get it"*, he gets mad and will not waste any more time with them.

The following three cases—toward a player, a reporter, and a medical doctor—clearly illustrate Mourinho's special understanding of the game, which he expects others around him to also possess.

First, during the 2016-2017 season when Mourinho became manager of Manchester United, he was publicly critical of promising left-back Luke Shaw. From day one, it appeared Mourinho believed Shaw did not have the right mentality and understanding of the game.

Here are Mourinho's post-match comments about Shaw:¹

"He must understand the game; he must think, and he must accelerate the process because 21-years-old is old enough to have a better understanding of the game. I was making every decision for him. At this level we need the fantastic body he has to play football, the fantastic physical qualities he has, the very good technical ability he has, but he cannot play with my understanding of the game".