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## UP THE WRITERS! THE SIX SHORT LISTED FINALISTS

The number of entries in this year's Up the Writers! Competition has now been whittled down to a short list of six.

I have included the six finalists who the judges have been deliberating over. They are in no particular order.

The overall winner will be announced tomorrow - FA Cup final day - at the final whistle!

I will be in touch to arrange delivery of the Noel Cantwell trophy and £100 cash prize.

I will accompany the winning entry with some photos as was the case last year.

It is important to note that the judges only received the stories - no names and no pictures. Their decision has been made solely on content.

It was remarked that the standard was again very good and may have even gone up a notch.

Thanks to everyone who took part and I urge you to read the six short-listed entries. They will plug in to your innate love of all things West Ham.

Enjoy!

## SHORT LISTED

JON TREVOR

My story goes back to the summer of 1969. I was playing football for Wingate. There were a fortnight of trials going on. It was a national scheme. On the first day, I had possibly the best days football I've ever had. I'm walking off the pitch and every player and coach said; "Well done!" I knew it was a fluke as I was sure there was half a dozen players better than me and that it would probably even out over the 14 days.

What I didn't know was that I was going to split my foot open in the showers and not be able to play for the next two weeks. I still went along and helped putting the nets up, putting the drinks out and so on. Wingate was in Finchley, and I lived in Leyton, so it was a bit of a shlep. When it was announced who was getting the trials, I was shocked when I was added on to the list. It was mentioned how I had a good attitude and had a particularly good first day.

When I went to West Ham, I was full of nerves. Our head coach (John Dick) put us at ease as best he could. Our first session after a couple of laps of the track was running up and down the old chicken Run. Then a few skills followed by a 5-a-side game. Best of all we could use the claret and blue bath to freshen up.

Over the next 15 weeks I went from near the back of the chicken run laps to being the fastest. My football improved so much that I got into the borough squad (never happened before). I once had to mark a certain Ade Coker. I was considered fast at school, but he was different class. I had to concentrate so much I came home with a migraine. (I didn't know it at the time). I learnt so much from Mr Dick and Frank Lampard who I used to meet on the bus to training. It wasn't to be.

But what an experience to train at the club that you supported. Mr Greenwood called me into his office and said: "We have loved having you here and one day I hope to be proved wrong and have to buy you back for £100,000. Never forget that football is the greatest game in the world and you should play it to whatever level you can for as long as you can." He also went on to mention my very good timekeeping and the fact I never claimed any expenses. The thing is, it was only a bus ride and although I could've claimed for a cab I didn't want to because it is my club and I wanted to do anything I could to help. Mr Dick made a special effort to find me, shake my hand, and wish me well. I think he liked the fact that although only a kid I asked lots of questions about fitness, football and life in general.

Jon Trevor



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## SHORT LISTED

JOE ENGLAND

“OUR FRANK”

Nearly 10 years ago, I started a working-class literary fanzine called PUSH. I used to write for a West Ham fanzine in the 90s and when I started my publication, I knew what I wanted to do regarding selling. Take it to football, an alternative read on the way home from a West Ham game. It soon went into overdrive on an underground level, developing in writing, interviews and design and ran for 23 issues. Going into the final season at Upton Park, 2015/16, many were saying that I should run a West Ham fanzine in a similar format to celebrate and lament the end of our history in E13.

I immediately had the name. All about the name. 5MANAGERS was born in my mind. A tribute to perhaps the only club who had so few managers over nearly a century. Syd King. Charlie Paynter. Ted Fenton. Ron Greenwood. John Lyall. With my previous mags, I knew in advance who I wanted to interview, and I went on to interview such West Ham legends as Mark Ward, Kenny Brown Junior, Frank McAvennie and Johnny Sissons. But in issue one of 5M, it had to be Frank Lampard Senior. He is as much an idol to me as Billy Bonds and Trevor Brooking. Because of the ‘association’ with his son, I felt it was not fair that he is not held and spoken about in the same high regard.

I knew a Chelsea fanzine editor who had connections with Frank Junior, and I got hold of a landline number. I left countless voicemails, but nothing came back. I was out one night with the Chelsea fanzine editor, and he asked if I had done the interview. Told him about my frustration and he called Frank Junior, who was based in New York at the time, he answered, and I said I am not getting any returned calls. Frank Junior replied, ‘Dad’s not incredibly good with phones, leave it with me.’

Two days later, I am sat in front of Frank Lampard Senior.

I was told I only had one hour. So, I set up my recorders and away we went; got on well from the first handshake – he has massive hands that made my small hands seem so much smaller. Early in, Frank expanded on his childhood and early years in Canning Town and playing football on cinder not grass. 20 minutes in Frank paused and said, ‘Joe, can you confirm something please.’ I replied, ‘Of course.’ He looked at me firmly, ‘Promise you will cut all the swearing out.’

How could I refuse?

The interview revealed his almost career-ending injury in his first season away at Sheffield United in a tackle with Willie Carlin – Frank broke two bones and was put in an ambulance and taken to Leeds Infirmary where they did an operation on his leg. He was left for five days in hospital with only the club’s physio, Rob Jenkins, for company. At the train station and with his leg in a cast, he was put on a mail trolley. Modern day footballers don’t know they have been born sprung to mind.

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Frank was in plaster for 28 weeks and when the cast was removed all the muscle in his leg had gone. He trained alone. Running lightly up and down the upper West Stand. He used to put a transistor radio in the middle of the tier, and he said how the ground staff would look up wondering what is going on up there?

He worked hard but couldn't put too much pressure on the leg as it would impact other joints. It was clear that not only did he previously have thoughts that his career was over from the start, but even with trying to regain some form of fitness, this must have had a massive impact on his mental well-being. But Frank was well supported by Ron Greenwood and John Lyall.

When he was back to what resembled almost match fitness, Frank was told he lacked pace. After training, Ron and John made him stay behind, had him running around Upton Park in trainers with spikes. Upon his return to the first team, Frank showed that not only was he back, but he also now had pace. His son would later also stay alone after training to work on his own development.

From father to son.

We discussed his whole career in great detail and when we hit the hour, I said to Frank, 'I think we are done,' what with being told in advance I only had an hour. Frank looked at me with a pained expression, 'What you talking about? I'm enjoying this.'

Frank is a loyal long serving West Ham player. Two FA Cup winners' medals, ECWC runners up (could go into detail about another injury he got on the night of the final that many are not aware of, but that is another story) and he had a famous terrace song that gave birth after his FA Cup semi-final replay winning header at Elland Road.

As previously referenced, his son set up the interview. When I asked Frank if he still went over West Ham, he said he did. He is born and bred West Ham. But what upset me was when he said how when he goes, he wears a big hat, pulled down; so noone recognises him. Think about that.

A brilliant professional footballer, a humble giant of a man.

There should be The Frank Lampard Senior Stand at the London Stadium or better still, a bronze statue of Frank diving to head the ball into the net at Elland Road. Of course, neither will happen and this is the absolute neglect of a forgotten true West Ham legend.

But not by me.

'I'm dreaming of a Frank Lampard, just like the one at Elland Road. When the ball came over and Frank fell over and scored the fucking winning goal.'



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## SHORT LISTED

SIMON BENJAMIN

### "RECOLLECTIONS"

This story begins, not with another 'take' on the history of West Ham United. That's already been well documented by those far more qualified than me. Numerous great books and articles have already been written by those with the ability to research facts and details, in a manner that never ceases to astound: players' names, shirt numbers, transfer fees, on-pitch incidents; all from previous eras; who'd been booked or sent off, where and for what reason. So much has already been recorded.

Going to the pub these days with friends of nearly four decades, regularly confirms my belief that I was born without one specific yet important gene; that part of my DNA which enables the minutiae of football-related information, to become embedded within the human mind. Although we've all been supporting the same team, attending the same games for many years, my friends can frequently call upon memories that are simply lost to me. So, rather than providing some muddled, personal recollections of past seasons, or grumbles about E20 (particularly fans who find it necessary to buy chips and popcorn thirty minutes into a game), this is my own potted history: a tale that has its roots in South East London, on a rainy day in 1964.

I know! South East London!

I should point out here and now, that my parents had absolutely no interest in football. Thus, bless them both, they also had no idea, how such an unfortunate start in life could potentially damage their second-born son. At the tender age of eight, I was taken to my first football match by a young lady named Pat; a student who was living with us at that time. I think I may have been excited prior to the game, although needless to say, I have few memories of the big day. However, it was cold, wet, thoroughly miserable, and there were no goals. Thankfully, this was a time before replica *this* and over-priced *that*; a time when rosettes and rattles were still in vogue with many fans. And so it was, that following that fateful afternoon, I trudged home without any kind of football memorabilia; not even a blue and white scarf!

That day could have turned out very differently. My entire life could very easily have been so horribly different.

A few months later in that very same year, West Ham United won the FA Cup. A season later, the trophy cabinet was enlarged to take the European Cup Winners' Cup and, a year after that... well, the FA might just as well have put the World Cup in the same cabinet. In the school playground (even in South East London), every young lad was Geoff Hurst, Martin Peters or Bobby Moore. Blue and white went somewhat out of fashion, in 1966.

In September of 1967 aged 11, I arrived at Malory Secondary School; still south of the river, but thankfully well away from New Cross and its associated evils. By now, my playground impersonations of the three aforementioned gods of that time had been honed to perfection, or so I believed. More encouragement was to follow, though. After 'trials' for the house 5-a-side football team had been completed, my Dad was asked to purchase a claret and blue shirt for me; I'd been 'selected'! Claret and Blue were the colours of Gawain House, and so the love affair was cemented. Proud was not the word, either for Dad or for me. But the tale of my enlightenment doesn't stop there. **Continued...**



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As the early days of a secondary education continued, 1967 slipped seamlessly into 1968. However, during the subsequent academic months, it came to my attention that my history teacher Mr Marshall was a 'proper' footballer; playing for Margate FC, when he wasn't teaching. I have to say, this information was considerably more impressive than anything he may have been teaching me about Anne Boleyn (Who knew, eh?). It became even more impressive, once it had been revealed to me that West Ham were going to play a testimonial game, against Mr Marshall's team! The school had about 1400 kids, and I've a feeling a large proportion of them wanted to be in the Margate crowd, on the night in question. Thankfully, by that time, my interest in football and the associated allegiance to WHU had become well known, throughout the school.

And so it was, that I became one of twenty or so very fortunate pupils who got to stand in the floodlit crowd of about 5,500, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1968, watching my heroes battle to a 6-6 draw. Now, such is my lack of any decent memory, that I don't even remember Martin Peters scoring five of the West Ham goals that night, although to be fair, the game was over fifty years ago.

As is probably too often the way with our teachers, we seldom get the opportunity to thank them for their input into our formative years. I left Malory in July of 1973 and, since then, have never once had the inclination to watch Margate FC. I don't know how Mr Marshall's teaching career progressed, but I truly hope it went well.

Perhaps, I was always destined to follow West Ham. In life, especially young life, it's always best to embrace good fortune, whenever it presents itself. In my own case, there was one early close shave with an alternate destiny, followed by some wonderful coincidences. And that's to say nothing of the lovely guys in the pub! Viewing ITV's recent re-airings of 'The Big-Match', I'm again reminded, just how much fun my journey's been. I watch the blurry re-runs of highlights from the Boleyn, almost 'as live', no longer remembering the final scores... despite having been in the crowd!

Though I remember nothing of the Margate testimonial game itself, the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1968 will never be forgotten... if you see what I mean. Suffice to say, it contributed in no small way, to a lifelong passion.

**Simon Benjamin**



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MARTIN HALL

"THE POWER TO OVERCOME"

West Ham United v Sevilla 17 March 2022

Going into this game, everyone knew it needed a huge effort. A stand-out performance. To proceed to the Europa League Quarterfinals our team needed to create a new page in West Ham's history, to create a night those inside the London Stadium would never forget, something we would talk about for years to come. Anything less would have meant we had fallen short. Honestly speaking, how many of us thought that all of those boxes could be ticked? That on the night, we could deliver all of those positives, without being forced to concede any negatives. In this competition Sevilla had grade, experience and the grit to grind out results, often in low scoring, tightly contested matches. After all, they have won this competition more than anyone else and are the only team to go on to defend that title. Going into the game with a deficit we would have to do everything right and could not afford to get anything wrong.

That nervous energy, that anxious tension, seeped into every fan inside the stadium, it drove us, motivated us and terrified us all at the same time. The only release was to roar on our team, to demand the only result that would see West Ham prevail. The internal chasms from one tier of seating to the next felt bridged with songs old and new. A desire to turn a corner from the flag planting protests of just 4 years ago emerged. With a triumphant display, a marker in history could be placed. From here on, the largest crowd for a West Ham United home game could serve to demonstrate that great nights were not exclusive to Upton Park, that while still not perfect, new chapters of our history can and must be written in E20.

And then it went up a level.

The slow-motion trajectory of Soucek's perfectly placed header created a brief hush while looping goalward, before the noise, the relief and the emotion exploded into the arena. For those few moments real life stopped, day-to-day monotony was paused, we were all transported to an ecstasy where nothing was impossible and all of our dreams and desires, for the briefest of moments, were within our collective reach.

Then came the inevitable lull, the come-down without which there is no high, Sevilla are a good team. They fought back. They made things harder. The noise remained, the power of hope and of the desire to dream bigger, the sheer will that this might just happen.

And when it did the responsibility fell to a man who was forced to collect his family from Poland only a few weeks ago as they fled war-torn Ukraine, a man who doesn't yet know what will become of his friends and extended family at home. Yet, it didn't feel like the Hollywood scriptwriters dream that it should have been. It just felt like it was always going to happen. It was natural. And while no one took it for granted, Andriy Yarmalenko, calmly putting the ball in the net, demonstrated the power of our special club. Because we were all there taking the same kick with him.

Martin Hall





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WOLFGANG BERGER

### "MATCH OF A LIFETIME"

The current season of 2021/22 will without doubt be one to be remembered by the West Ham faithful forever. With wins over FC Sevilla and Olympique Lyon, the Hammers have reached a European semifinal only for the third time in their history. But this year also marks the tenth anniversary of the latest final West Ham have played in, the 2012 play-off final at Wembley. When it comes to my best West Ham experience, this match still stands out of all Hammers games I have been to: West Ham vs. Blackpool fighting for promotion to the Premier League in May 2012.

After relegation in 2010/11, West Ham had vowed to fight for immediate promotion to the Premier League. But there was also a different kind of fight around the corner: shortly before West Ham set up the play-off final against Blackpool, my doctor had told me about his concerns and urged me to undergo some tests. However, I would not have thought that my first trip to New Wembley was going to be the last visit to a football ground for some time.

Being a long-time Hammers supporter, it was out of question that I had to try to get a ticket and be present in person when the club played at Wembley, regardless that a "footy trip" on this date did not quite fit into the current situation and the diet plan I had to stick to. However, when I planned the trip, I didn't know that my future health condition would keep me from travelling and attending large crowds for some time, and would make it impossible to use the tickets I had got for the Summer Olympics in London 2012.

But with the Wembley play-off final ahead and a ticket in hand, I defied all objections. Different from other trips, I made this one all by myself and cut my stay short. Having made up my mind on such a short notice, I even hadn't been able to schedule any meet-up with London based friends before the match. However, with all the pubs close to the stadium being completely overcrowded, we would hardly have found each other there.

Therefore I skipped the pre-match drink, and quite early I found myself passing the huge statue of Bobby Moore in front of the stadium. Of course the great man wore a West Ham scarf as did the majority of supporters. Then into the stadium and up to the stands - surprisingly with an escalator, reminding me of my arrival at Heathrow earlier that day! Before the kick-off, when "God Save the Queen" was played, everyone got up from their seats and here, in the "West Ham End" behind the goal, nobody folded them back down again, cheering on the team in claret and blue every minute of the match.

We really had something to cheer about in the first half when West Ham took the lead thanks to Carlton Cole, one of the players who had stayed with the club despite relegation. But then, almost immediately after the break, Blackpool was level. Now it was a typical "cup game" with a lot of end-to-end stuff and chances for both sides.

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In the 80th minute Kevin Nolan tried a spectacular one touch shot, but it only rattled the crossbar in front of the West Ham supporters. However, only three minutes later redemption for the "claret and blue army" was near: again Nolan was involved, with the West Ham skipper receiving the ball on the left of Blackpool's half and crossing it into the box where Carlton Cole got his boot on the ball. However, he could not direct a shot on goal due to a joint intervention of Blackpool's keeper and a defender. But out of this scramble in the five yard box the ball rolled to Ricardo Vaz Te who finally hammered it into the net from close range to make it 2-1. With this result West Ham were back to the Premier League and the cheers almost lifted the roof off Wembley Stadium.

What a joy that was, making me forget all the doubts around the trip and the upcoming medical tests. It was so good to celebrate this victory and to sing with all the Irons around me, regardless of not knowing anyone of them. Albeit, watching the play-off trophy being lifted by the players and singing "Bubbles" and other songs together with all the West Ham faithful again and again, while the squad was celebrating on the pitch, was not the end of the story... Well, when I got onto the tube on the way back from Wembley I suddenly bumped into my mate Sam. What a coincidence to meet one of my oldest friends in London among tens of thousands of fans, without having made any appointment!

However, I believe there's nothing to happen entirely by chance, God makes everything work together for those who know and love him. Learning about the extent of my illness when I had got home, the things that had happened on that Saturday afternoon at Wembley – having been able to celebrate West Ham's victory before my personal "match of a lifetime" was about to begin, and meeting up with an old friend, entirely by chance – became a sign for me that I could start my own fight with confidence and optimism.

It was the help of my doctors and the support of my family, as well as the lasting joy of this West Ham experience at Wembley and my faith that God meant well for me, which made another victory possible. Not only West Ham had won its most important match of 2012; by the end of the year, I knew that I had only missed the Olympic Games, but would be able to cheer on the Hammers in London once again.

And that's what I'm doing to this day! Come on you Irons!

**Wolfgang Berger**





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## SHORT LISTED

MICK MELBOURNE

This could be a very unusual entry in the fact that I am probably one of your oldest entrants (74). Also, by the time entries have closed, this essay could be completely irrelevant.

I am sure that I am not the only person to be amused by the draw for the Europa League semi-finals and I am definitely not one of the many jumping on the “wouldn’t it be lovely to play Barcelona?” bandwagon. No, my wish is for West Ham and Eintracht Frankfurt to win their quarter final ties and meet-up in the semis. This, as you have probably guessed by now, is because I was present at both legs when the teams met in the semi -final of the European Cup Winners Cup in 1976. The memories of the trip to Germany will always be with me, especially as I had taken a strong interest in German football since the 1966 World Cup.

It started with a seat on the fans’ coach, but I was not going to watch the game with them. A friend was a photographer and he blagged me a pass as his “assistant”. The journey was smooth enough apart from a delay at the German border because the driver did not have the right documentation. They should never have let Keith Robson drive! We got to the ground early and were hanging around in the corridor when Ron Greenwood stopped for a chat. He was very friendly, but I did wonder why he wasn’t with the team, even though he had been shunted “upstairs” by then.

Just before kick-off we took our places behind the goal. I was under strict instructions not to say or do anything controversial. That would have been a first! We were behind the goal that Graham Paddon scored into to give us the lead and I’m 30 feet up in the air. I was wearing my sheepskin coat, wildly fashionable at the time, and still to be seen on certain occasions. The German press were less than pleased with me and it was probably fortunate that I could not speak the language. After that it was all hands to the pump to leave the score at 2-1 but, as Sevilla have found out recently, a one goal lead is not always enough.

Anyhow, the game was to have amusing repercussions as, on arriving home, I was to enjoy my 15 minutes of fame. As I walked through my front door my mum greeted me with the immortal words for every wannabee “weren’t you on the telly last night?” I got into work the next morning and my boss asked the same thing. As I had spent some considerable time beforehand debating whether to pull a sickie, I was mightily relieved. Then the phone kept ringing for.... well 15 minutes with friends asking the same question. My account of the trip was published, highly edited, in Foul magazine, the first alternative football publication. The incident even turned up on Question of Sport years later. “Who scored the goal and who was the attention-seeking idiot in the sheepskin coat?” For verification that this really happened, a visit to You Tube will put your minds at rest.

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What is not in doubt is that we had a really good team with Trevor pulling the strings and William Arthur Bonds daring his mates to slacken their efforts for even a millisecond. The addition of Keith Robson and Billy Jennings, whilst being bad news for the gifted Clyde Best, had added skill and aggression and lots of goals. So, it was no surprise that two weeks later on a pulsating night under the Upton Park floodlights we overturned the deficit. Two goals from Brooking and one from Robson sent a really able team home to Germany with their tails between their legs. May I also suggest that this was the night when the "Upton Park under floodlights" legend was cemented?

I did also attend the final, this time with the fans, but I found it a complete anti-climax. Between 1967 and 1990 I attended most home matches and as many away games as I could. I have many memories, but Frankfurt 1976 is the absolute standout. The team we had that season was very similar to today's squad, full of effort and resilience, which has not always been the case.

**Mick Melbourne**