



HOW TO BE A SPORTS AGENT

MEL STEIN

HIGH STAKES

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EDITION

By the same author

How to Complain

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SPORTS AGENT

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For all those players who stayed loyal to me
throughout their careers and
in particular JG, RC, JO and CB

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Introduction

*We are agents, we are agents,
No one likes us, we don't care.*

A sad refrain, but an accurate one. Even I, after writing a book as to how to succeed as one, always veer away from the nametag of 'agent'.

'How shall we describe you?' they ask, whenever I make a media appearance. 'Sports agent?'

'No,' I say as an automatic response. 'Sports lawyer', or as The FA would now have me designated 'Registered Lawyer'.

And indeed, I've started so many conversations with potential clients by saying,

'I'm not an agent, I'm a solicitor.'

Now you could equally appositely sing,

*We are lawyers. We are lawyers.
No one likes us, we don't care.*

But this isn't a book about how to succeed as a solicitor (though there's an idea!). It's about how to be a successful sports agent. And, I suppose, how to achieve that in an ethical way so that sports agency can be regarded as a profession of which one can be proud to be a member.

That is going to be some challenge. Perhaps, when I've finished I'll read the book myself and you will see on your

screens those magic words, ‘Mel Stein, Sports Agent’.

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since the first two editions of this book were published. Transfer fees in professional football have risen astronomically, largely due to the desire of Chelsea’s owner to purchase any player any potential rival could possibly want. But other clubs have joined in the chase for glory to push salaries in the Premiership to new heights. And now we have the new FA Agents Regulations with which to contend and to which I will simply refer from here on in as The FA Regulations. It was difficult before them to be an agent specialising in football clients, but now it has been made doubly difficult. I was going to say well-nigh impossible but that might have discouraged wannabe football agents from reading any further or even, if word of mouth got out, to kill the sales of this book stone dead in the water.

It was Dave Nightingale writing in the United States for *The Sporting News* some years ago, who cynically said, ‘Want to be an agent? Open your mouth and declare yourself one. You don’t need a law degree or a certified public accountant’s shingle. You don’t need an education, you don’t have to have a licence... a knowledge of sport is preferable but not mandatory. All you have to do is convince some professional athlete or would-be pro that you can get a better deal for them from their employer than they could get for themselves. Voilà! You are a member of one of the world’s newest professions.’

But is that right? Maybe you don’t need a law degree, but FIFA, the world’s governing body of football (that’s soccer for anybody in the States picking up this volume and thumbing through – well, at least you understood ‘accountant’s shingle’!) does accept that a qualified lawyer doesn’t need to be licensed, although, as you will see later, The FA does not agree. However, as for everybody else, licensing regulations haven’t taken too long to start wrapping their tentacles around the world’s newest profession, not just in football but in many other sports as well. Indeed, in football, more people fail the licensing exam now than pass, so at least that’s a start.

In its simplest form, an agent is a representative of a principal,

i.e. an agent is an individual or a company who represents a sportsperson. They try to get them a better contract; a better endorsement; a better sponsorship; a better deal. Nothing wrong with that, is there? Or is there? Many of my journalistic ‘friends’ think there is. Just read Patrick Collins in *The Mail on Sunday* for one. Actually, don’t bother. He never writes anything nice about anybody – me in particular.

But this is not a book about how to hate journalists. If you ever get to represent a high-profile player you won’t need a book for that, it will just come naturally. This is a book not just about how to succeed, but how to remain successful and, at the same time, deal always in your clients’ interests. The problem there lies in the conflict between the interests of the agent and the interests of the principal (i.e. the sportsperson). When a lawyer represents a client, then the interests of the client are paramount. The lawyers’ governing body says so. If a solicitor puts his own interests first, then The Solicitors Regulation Authority in the United Kingdom will deal with him (or her... no need to be sexist about this, as many female solicitors as male are subject to disciplinary proceedings) accordingly and, if necessary, will strike him, or her, off. Yet all too often a small number of agents of sportspeople are concerned with their commissions first and their clients second. And I hope you noticed how I subtly shifted away from disciplinary proceedings against lady lawyers. I want children to be able to read this book and say:

‘Daddy, when I grow up I want to be a sports agent.’

Back to the business in hand. Surely if the client’s income is maximised then it must follow that the agent’s commission must similarly rise. This ignores the one factor that must make every athlete tremble in their designer tracksuit – human greed. If an employer makes £1,000,000 available to a sportsperson and an agent takes 10% then they’ll earn £100,000, leaving their client with £900,000. However, if the agent persuades the club to pay them £200,000 (which as we’ll see later is a breach of The FA Regulations) then suddenly their client is left with a miserly £800,000. What, no tears for the athlete who

has to struggle through on a sum in excess of three-quarters of a million?

But that is part of the problem too. There is so much money sloshing around in professional sport today that the wrong people are being enticed into sport to act as representatives. So maybe the title of this book should be *How to be a Good Sports Agent* or *How to be an Honest Sports Agent* or, better still, *How to be a Good Honest Sports Agent*.

That is what I will be aiming to do. To show you how to keep the balance, to do the best for your client and still earn enough money for yourself. To find a way through the minefields of regulations created by the various governing bodies of sports. Greed is not good but making money for yourself in a honest and ethical way is not bad either.