



RUSSELL BRAND

Articles of Faith

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Russell Brand



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Introduction

I am writing this intro so that you feel validated in purchasing this compilation of columns. If I don't write it you might feel aggrieved that you've coughed up money (yuk! Who'd do that? You could only cough it up if you'd eaten it. I hate those people that eat coins and light bulbs and clock parts. Why don't they get a proper job? Like me for instance, I write a lovely column – and intros to column compilations – you won't catch me scoffing down change and chewing cogs then thrusting my coppery palm into your face for remuneration: 'If you wanted money you should of kept those pennies instead of gargling them down your whorish trachea' one might respond. I'm also against 'beards of bees' and, in fact, all records. I don't know how Guinness have snided their way into the world of records – it's none of their business, stick to booze, what's next – the Benson and Hedges encyclopaedia of maritime mysteries? The Skull Bandits almanac of porn? The Olympics can fuck off an' all – it's just the Paralympics for people who haven't suffered, it doesn't make sense. Running, jumping, swimming, triple jump, high jump. Don't they know there's a war on? Do they know it's Christmas? Timing things? Grow up. The only occasions on which my actions were timed were when my dad was tricking me into going to the newsagents. 'Go on, I'll time ya!' he'd say. Though by the time I'd return the competitive element had dissolved, replaced by fag-snatching indifference. Where's my medal? Where's my tickertape parade? I wasn't even allowed to keep the change. Luckily I nicked it anyway) only to read stuff you could've got for tuppence ha'penny with the *Guardian*, plus you'd've got all the ol' news in that an' all – not to mention those gorgeous tarts on page three and the weather. But with this book, you get all the articles – together at last, the cover picture, in which I am unadvisedly posing as Christ and interviews with famous football fans – providing I've had time to do them. What a bargain. I don't know why I'm trying to sell you this book; you've obviously already bought it. Unless it's a friend's copy or you're in a shop. If so, pop it in your jacket and walk out – I don't care – I've already been paid plus I don't really do it for the money, I do it for the honour and my love of the art of intro writing. I could sit and write intros all day.

It just occurred to me that you might be reading this in the distant future, having chanced upon this in a second-hand book shop from the future. Should that be the case, get back on your hover-pod and watch the

final glacier dwindle into naught and lament that you never knew the glory that was the 07–08 football season.

It was an incredible season, beset with drama and fused with romance. I love the game itself, of course, but these articles focus chiefly on my reaction to the phenomena of football culture – Sir Alex Ferguson, who doth abide and will ne'er relent, like a face carved into the edifice of the national game as though it were Mount Rushmore; Kevin Keegan, who in the past brought Newcastle so close to success but now has the air of a Sunday league dad hollering 'go on my son – they don't like it up 'em' from the touchline; Avram Grant, poor unlovable Avram whose legacy is as murky and as difficult to judge as the dental blur that resides betwixt his lips; Ronaldo, a man allegedly labelled a slave by that flippant nit Sepp Blatter – a tag he did too little to shed ('Yeah, I am like a slave – I remember that episode of *Roots* where Kunta Kinte, reclining in silver hot pants, got nosed off on a yacht by a never-ending procession of gorgeous floosies – no wonder he was peeved.'). Ronaldo has remained at United, wisely allowing his free will to be coaxed into acquiescence by the endlessly successful Fergie. I'm sure he'll be a better man for it but how can he top last season?

Then of course there's my beloved Hammers, for whom it was a relatively uneventful year, which typically means that the subsequent season will see Upton Park burned to the ground or Lionel Messi join the club – West Ham cannot be mediocre with any degree of consistency, they are defined by volatility. Or should I say 'we' for Paulo Di Canio himself, one of the club's most beloved anti-heroes, referred to the institution of West Ham as 'you' while addressing 'me'. A team he played for for over four years and yet he grammatically acknowledged the strength of my allegiance. This is where the game's power lies. When abroad, if I see someone in the shirt of a British football team, even Tottenham, after ascertaining that they're not dangerously drunk, I will make eye contact and talk. About football. It gives us a common language. We recognise that whether you're hollering for Hull City to stay up or for Manchester United to gobble up another cup, what you're actually doing is submerging your identity as an individual into a whole that is common to us all. Separation is an illusion and in a game that is built around opposition we discover that ultimately we are all one.

1

This year I'll ride the snake like a soccer shaman

Today I am going to watch West Ham vs Man City for the first game of the new calendar. The season's commencement feels all fresh, lovely and new. We've rinsed away the horror and regret of last season; I suppose that's another of the sublime delights entailed within the game – a terminable, manageable existence within defined parameters. Regardless of how spectacular or drab your term has been it'll all begin again next August. That's comforting. Better than actual life where if you hijack a bus and drive it into an old folks' home yawping slogans and hurling fireworks the consequences will haunt you to your grave.

I shall make my way to Upton Park all virginal and brimming with innocent expectation with a couple of chums, perhaps singing 'three little maids from school are we' from the *Mikado*. Noel Gallagher will be there in his capacity as a City fan elevating further the jeopardy for this already thrilling encounter as football kindly provides a context for good-natured banter and playful threats – again within defined parameters.

The close season, or anti-season – a kind of negative un-time that exists only in relation to the Platonic, pure season – has been a fiscal torrent with cash flooding the Premiership and now buoyant corpses bloated with expectation bob towards the first whistle.

'I shall make my way to Upton Park all virginal and brimming with innocent expectation'

There has been much condemnation of the way in which the influx of money has poisoned the game and it's difficult to dispute that recent events have tarnished football's romance. But the effects of rampant capitalism are not confined to peculiar transfers and boardroom espionage – it's balling up the entire planet. I saw in a red top that cocaine was found in the lavvies at 25 per cent of Premiership grounds, implying that the clubs are somehow culpable. People take cocaine; people go to football, that is all that's been proven in that barmy cistern survey. Similarly the whole world is governed by an ideology that demands that the acquisition of money must subjugate all else: morality, spirituality and good old-fashioned sexiness are secondary to commerce, and this cannot be blamed on Carlos Tevez, Malcolm Glazer or

even Thaksin Shinawatra, although he might've been closer to the nub of the problem in his last job.

When caught up in the magic of live football it's easy to believe that the power of the crowd is what ultimately matters; the inherent unity feels like socialism but each of the screaming 34,000 has been taxed on entry and however loud they may sound their voices are seldom heard. It is apparently futile to resist progress although tiny victories are occasionally achieved: disenchanting Manchester United fans have established FC United, a collectively financed club that truly belongs to its supporters. Presumably, though, were the club to clamber through the multitude of leagues to penetrate the national consciousness and challenge for trinkets the inevitable tide would also consume this idealistic vessel.

Myself, I get all caught up in the rhubarb, I'm intrigued by escalating transfer fees and bonkers wages, I enjoy the soap opera. How can United fail to win the title this year? They've assembled a terrifying gang of world-class players, and quaint idealism aside I'm tantalised by the prospect of seeing Tevez hook up with Rooney. Chelsea's current injury problems may impair them early on but that Malouda bloke looked good in the Community Shield and they know how to scrap. I'd like Liverpool to do well – Torres is a handsome devil and I'm sure he'll cause all sorts of bother. Arsenal have a stability which oughtn't to be underestimated and were coping without Henry for the majority of last season. And I suppose we'll all be interested to see what Spurs do with their panoply of strikers.

There's been more diverse transfer activity than in recent memory but I'll still be surprised if the top four in May ain't the typical blend of red and blue. Newcastle, Villa, Pompey, Blackburn, West Ham and Sunderland will be shuffling around the Uefa places and I think Reading, Bolton and Wigan might be auditioning for the fizzy pop league.

Apart from the obvious top four element I'll be interested to see how those predictions pan out because I have an unscientific mind fuelled chiefly by emotion and whimsy. I shall be utterly agog if come next August the above paragraph doesn't appear to be the result of a drunken, myopic pianist being deceived that my keyboard is a futuristic Steinway and told to 'just go nuts'.

I shall enjoy this year's football; I'll ride the snake, like Jim Morrison as a soccer-ball shaman. I'm not going to focus on the incremental erosion of the essence of the beautiful game because it is symptomatic of a much larger problem. I'd like to suggest that we enjoy the football then come late May, in the unseason, instead of watching the to-ing and fro-ing and the 'I'd rather

not going' we unite under one glorious banner, march down Whitehall and kick off a proper revolution.

2

A pitch-perfect ending to a sadly familiar song

Sven-Goran Eriksson's Manchester City commanded play at Upton Park last week with such assurance and grace that far from seeming a hastily assembled squad of mercenaries from around this dirty little circle we call 'world', they appeared to be afloat in a transcendental love affair with each other and the randy boffin who compiled them.

Flicks and dummies, winks and one-twos, it had the gleeful complicity of a well-administrated orgy at a hostel for handsome backpackers. What's a bit annoying from the perspective of an Englishman is that now Sven can utter the damnation that secretly we all suspected to be true; he can manage perfectly well once liberated from the tiresome obligation to select only sons of Albion. As he said himself: 'There was no Elano to pick for England.' Blast.

Rolando Bianchi, who got City's first, ran directly over to the dugout to give Sven a cuddle, publicly consummating the Manchester love right in front of the embarrassed West Ham fans. We didn't know where to look; most people opted to rest their disillusioned peepers 'pon Dean Ashton, warming up on the sidelines for most of the match with a peculiarly erotic, slow-motion, sexy karate-robot dance.

For me the opening day of the season was an oscillating mind waltz of conflicting emotions. The Irons were pretty shoddy, disorganised in midfield, lacking in imagination up front and a nerve-jangling ballet of tipsy confusion is what passed for a defence. Only Robert Green in goal and Mark Noble looked comfortable.

The ignominy was exacerbated by the prior knowledge of an after-match meeting with Noel Gallagher in Christian Dailly's box. Most people are aware that the Gallagher brothers are arrogant as a default setting, a feat they performed whilst supporting an unreliable and often risible football team. Well let me tell you that all the swagger and bluster we endured as discs went platinum and Brits were won were as nought compared to the gloating, showboating, puffed-up rhubarb I had to silently tolerate in a senior player's box after Saturday's misdemeanour.

I'd rather hoped that it would be me bragging and strutting, perhaps whilst chuffing on a cigar, consoling a tearful Noel that the season is yet young and that he'd made some jolly good records. Instead me, my dad, my mate Jack and Robin the hippy black cab driver (there's an anomaly – if you

leap into his carriage unawares it's like a magical mystery tour as he recites poems and demands a more lax immigration policy) moped about, overjoyed to be amongst adored West Ham players (James Collins was also there like a big, twinkly beefcake) but irked by the unanticipated defeat.

'Strolling on to the eternity lawn at the Boleyn makes my brain stop gurgling and my eyes do crying'

Then something magical happened. Dailly, who was about to take his adorable trio of wee Daillys to have a kick-about on the pitch, turned to us and said 'Do youse wanna come down an' all?' None of us have ever been on the pitch at Upton Park. I'm not a man who is much at ease in any arena designed for physical activity but to walk on to the turf of the team you've supported all your life, were deigned to support, even before birth, is like climbing into the telly or being given the keys to Wonka's chocolate factory and being told, 'Here, just take it, I'm dispensing with all these bonkers tests and riddles – too many children have died. Poor, dear Augustus Gloop.'

Although, retrospectively, running a chocolate factory is probably a pain in the arse, whereas strolling on to the eternity lawn at the Boleyn makes my brain stop gurgling and my eyes do crying. On the way we sneakily looked into the away dressing room – which looked like it had played host to a tea party for giant toddlers. There were bottles and grass and fruit scattered about the room like Jackson Pollock working in litter. You could still feel the echo of the departed, triumphant City players, you could envisage them congaing out behind Sven, covered in victory and streamers.

Then we were in the tunnel. A mural of West Ham legends adorned the walls; Brooking, Dicks, Moore, Devonshire, lit by the glare from the end of the tunnel, the light reflecting green. A few more tentative steps with the opening notes of Bubbles played by a phantom orchestra (or possibly covers band) and there it was, Upton Park, scene of misery and celebration, venue for rites of passage for hundreds of thousands of men, barely an hour before fizzing with hope, then saturated in defeat, now silent, empty, and Bagpuss was just a sobby ol' stuffed cat...

But there amidst the burgeoning nothing, chatting to Dailly, all normal, stood Dean Ashton, radiant with health, which is odd 'cos he's a few weeks off full fitness. My mate Jack stuck out a hand. 'All right, Deano.' Dean being, in reality, a bloke rather than the subject of an unrelenting sonnet rolling around the mouths of 30,000 even before he'd kicked a ball, simply replied: 'All right.' I scuttled over like a ninny and accosted Dean. I don't

remember what I said but it can't have been great because I felt the necessity to impersonate Dean's warm-up dance routine which, looking back, strikes me as an act of desperation.

Dean laughed. As did the few people remaining in the ground, mostly in the directors' boxes. Then I met Alan Taylor, scorer of two Hammers goals in the 1975 FA Cup final, while my dad, Jack and Robin the hippy cabby kicked a ball around the Bobby Moore Stand end of the pitch with Christian Dailly's kids. 'Come on Russell, join in,' someone shouted. I declined; I could only have tarnished perfection.

'Wembley and Germany are typically powerful sirens to summon my slumbering jingoism. Not this time'

3

A pledge is not enough to make England shine

You know them pledges we make when England are knocked out of major tournaments on penalties? Typically the pledge will be formed along the lines of: ‘England, you have betrayed us and shamed us. Worse than that, you have given us momentary hope, and hope is so much harder to withstand than despair, thus I shall never more be inveigled into caring about your results or supping the toxic broth of brouhaha that surrounds the carnival of fools we call our national team.’

‘If it was up to me I’d put chimps in the team, and ballroom dancers’

‘Tis a long and solemn oath. That’s usually how it is for me; then the tournament continues without England, all pale and ghostly, and I’m left to ponder what I do with my life, drifting listlessly, unable to feel, involving myself in any senseless bagatelle just to try and stir some emotion. Then, like a tragically willing victim of spousal abuse, I find myself lured back into the tempest by the gorgeous oaf that is patriotism and the incessant promise that they’ve changed.

Well, I think that on Wednesday I might’ve broken the cycle. I know it was a friendly but it was at Wembley and against Germany – two powerful sirens that are typically sufficient to summon my slumbering jingoism. Not this time.

I just went out and got on with my life. ‘Alan Smith might play’, I heard echoing through ol’ Jung’s collective brain box. I continued with my chores. ‘Joe Cole will be given a more creative role’ – I remained undeterred. ‘Micah Richards is gonna get his willy out’ – I was curious but did not seek out a Dixons window in which to confirm the rumour.

Everyone’s quite rightly excited by Richards but am I alone in detecting homoerotic undertones in the relentless drooling about his athleticism and his ‘leap’? ‘Ooh, what a leap,’ pundits say, struggling to stifle a stifle; ‘I’ve never seen a leap like it’; ‘I wish he’d leap into my parlour, then leap on to my bunk, then leap about on my tummy till I cry guilty tears about my bastard marriage vows.’ That’s what they say, these pundits. They say it with their eyes.

Micah 'The Leap' Richards is the most encouraging thing about England but I was not seduced into watching the game because I still feel a bit despondent about international football. I think this is because of the following:

1. Steve McClaren. I believe him to be a bit of an appeaser – 'You want Beckham back? Have Beckham back.' He seems to make reactionary decisions and as much as we might think we can manage England, we can't and shouldn't be allowed to. 'Don't listen to me,' I feel like saying, 'I'm whimsical, capricious, vindictive and jealous. I make stupid decisions.' If it was up to me I'd put chimps in the team, and ballroom dancers. It'd be ridiculous, but fortunately I have no power.

2. The team is going backwards through time with McClaren like an autistic archaeologist digging up veterans and former heroes who can only sully their good names. David James? Sol Campbell? Why not reinstate Bobby Charlton and get him to play a quick half. In fact get the entire pub team of legends from that beer advert and give them a go.

3. Sometimes I get depressed but it passes and I only think it's really bad when I think, 'What would make me happy?' and I can't think of anything. That's how England make me feel now. What would make it work? David Bentley? Aaron Lennon? Robert Green? There was a time when we'd clamour, that's right clamour, to have someone in the team: 'Pick Rooney' – 'But he's only 12' – 'PICK HIM'. Or, 'Take Gazza' – 'He's drunk' – 'TAKE HIM'. Now at the first sign of a clamour we're obeyed, it takes all the fun out of the clamouring. Having said that, PICK ROBERT GREEN.

Those are my three reasons. I dare say once the games become competitive I may feel a tingle but Premier League football hoovers up loyalty like a junkie ant eater so it'll never again be as painful as Italia 90 or Euro 96 or that kick in the nuts last summer. I shall enjoy international football perched like a connoisseur on a barstool of snooty indifference. And you can take that pledge right down to the ol' pledge bank.

4. Dark lore of Dyer and the Hammers' hex

I suppose, were I able to trade in some cosmic stock exchange, I would relinquish West Ham's passage into the third round of the League Cup in order to preserve Kieron Dyer's lower right leg. As Alan Curbishley said after the win against Bristol Rovers: 'Now the result seems immaterial.'

It's difficult to celebrate victory having seen Dyer suffer one of those wince-inducing injuries where the leg visibly contorts within the sock and it seems impossible to imagine it ever healing. It will, of course, in time, six months or so, but that's the bulk of the season without him and he looked sharp and fast against Wigan last Saturday.

I feel dead sorry for him, in a hospital somewhere hurting. Obviously I don't know what it's like to be a professional athlete but it must engender a particular insecurity to be dependent on your body in such a palpably direct manner. Whenever I suffer great physical pain or even mild discomfort it immediately resets my psychology to neutral. Say if I feel all sad and self-indulgent then get stung by a wasp, my misery feels quite abstract and I long just to be in spiritual pain once more – 'Damn you tiny assassin, all clad in yellow and black, how I crave my former innocence where melancholy was my only trial.'

'What?! Arsenal away in the fourth round? Damn you, Lucifer. Why have you forsaken me, Lord?'

It's terrible news for West Ham, and Curbishley implied there might be a jinx as so many of the players he's bought in have suffered injury. It is bloody unfortunate, but a curse? After last season's controversy plenty have grudges, not least in the city of steel. Could former Blades boss Neil Warnock be poised in a circle of stone, stinking of chicken's blood, spewing white-eyed incantations and clutching a buckled dolly of Julien Faubert?

There appears to be a troubling tendency among under-pressure Premiership managers to jab accusatory digits in the direction of the dark arts – Martin Jol cited 'black magic' as the reason Spurs didn't get a penalty at Old Trafford at the weekend. Perhaps Tottenham did deserve something from a tie in which United were less than brilliant and they doubtless had

chances but the resulting home win surely owes more to Nani's right foot and Wes Brown's chest/upper arm than Aleister Crowley's necromancy.

Perhaps this is a further indication that top-flight managers are under too much pressure, when in our secular age they crumble into medieval beliefs whenever luck goes against them – 'What?! Arsenal away in the fourth round? Damn you, Lucifer. Why have you forsaken me, Lord?' However, the injury crisis at Upton Park, if not the work of Beelzebub, is critical: Dean Ashton, Scott Parker, Dyer, Faubert, Freddie Ljungberg and both Lucas Neill and Matthew Upson joined the afflicted minutes after they signed. The only solution available to the club is to keep signing more players, an approach I believe was pioneered by Stalin in his gruelling fixture against Hitler on the Eastern Front.

His mentality was, as I understand, 'Right, loads of Germans are dying, loads of Russians are dying and we're both going to continue to pour young men into this battle until it's resolved, but as Russia has a larger stack of human chips we can carry on playing beyond the point of German exhaustion. I feel the hand of history, not on my shoulder but cheekily goosing me out of respect.'

Let's hurl more millionaire footballers onto this bonfire of the lame; why wait till they arrive at West Ham? Just give Eidur Gudjohnsen a sack of money then smash him in the balls with a pool cue. Let's buy a wing at Whitechapel hospital and send an army of thugs with chequebooks and chainsaws on a tour round Europe to assemble a hobbling chorus of convalescents. I wish Dyer a speedy recovery. It's a shame, and as an offer of appeasement to the angry football gods I shall sacrifice the next virgin I meet on Green Street. It could take a while.

5

Never mind Israel, I've been beaten by Bohemia

I am writing this at the Chelsea Hotel in New York, where Arthur Miller wrote *A View from the Bridge*, where Sid Vicious killed Nancy Spungen and where Leonard Cohen received 'head on an unmade bed' from Janis Joplin. As is the case with most hotels trading on history, it's a bloody dump.

When I phoned reception in the dead of night to ask for water, water, I was told: 'There's a deli across the street.' In Maslow's hierarchy of needs water is right there with shelter and excretion at the pyramid's foundation; they may as well dispense with the toilet and the building; they could just have a bellhop stood in the street charging you \$200 a night for crapping in the gutter and snuggling up with Oscar the Grouch. Comprised neatly in this scenario is the perennial issue of the romantic versus the pragmatic – you don't stay at the Chelsea for room service, you stay because you're renting a little counter-cultural history for the night.

'Rio said not qualifying is "unthinkable" but that just sounds like Chris Eubank describing the *Titanic*'

Today England face Israel at fortress Wembley, God help us. A draw against Brazil, defeat against Germany – it's not exactly impenetrable. Steven Gerrard has his own romance v pragmatism choice to make – does he play with a fractured toe, knowing his significance and skill are vital to Blighty, or does he heed the advice of his club and convalesce?

It seems that Stevie will play, which worries me for a couple of reasons. I hope no one treads on his foot in the game of football he is playing against Israel's national football team on a football pitch. Also it is difficult not to be concerned about the state of our squad when sickbeds have to be trundled to stadiums like wheelbarrows and tipped on to the field so we can scrabble together 11 men.

In addition to Steve McClaren's grave-robbing selection policy – this week Emile Heskey, next week Dixie Dean – it leaves me thinking that not qualifying is a realistic possibility. Romantically, I think, 'No, England shall qualify, 'tis our destiny. None shall pass.' But bloody hell it don't look good. Rio Ferdinand said that not qualifying is 'unthinkable' but that just sounds

like Chris Eubank describing the *Titanic*. It is thinkable, too bloody thinkable, I'm thinking about it right now in Yanksville, Americee, where in '94 a World Cup took place in which there was nobody speaking proper English and Alexi Lalas was just a Hanna-Barbera flesh sketch, a living Shaggy, not yet the manager of another resurrected McLazarus selection.

It's awful when England don't qualify; I'd rather watch every woman I've ever loved drunkenly fellating handsome idiots at a bus depot than sit through another USA '94. Actually the bus depot thing could be quite sexy, inducing a masturbatory experience that flits between jealousy and intense excitement, where one cries, despite oneself, during the act of onanism. I believe it's popularly known as a 'cr-ank'. But I'll be damned if I'm going to crank my way through Euro 2008. I'm older now and more dignified.

How are we to avoid this phantom of a nation lost in sexual flagellation – which would be an awful, Catholic, Marvin Gaye anthem: 'In this situation I need, sexual flagellation, get up, get up, get up, let's cry-wank tonight'? It'll never catch on, so how do we avoid it? Where do we look for salvation? Dear, hobbling Stevie Gerrard? Confidence junky Emile Heskey? Joe Cole? Possibly, but he's not starting for Chelsea and I don't think he's ever recovered from Glenn Roeder's barmy decision to make him put on two stone – why did he do it? He might as well've bulked up Darcy Bussell or Harry Potter.

I don't know if I'll be able to watch the qualifying matches as I'm all caught up making a documentary about Jack Kerouac and *On the Road* for the BBC and I've got more chance of discovering the essence of being that the Beats quested after than a telly showing soccer-ball – even in the Beckham era.

Good luck England. I reserve the right to flood these pages with hyperbole if we beat Israel and Russia, and begin a campaign for McClaren's knighthood. Such is the nature of football. Now for a spot of breakfast at the Chelsea, which will most likely be a lampshade smeared in peanut butter, by me with a room key. No wonder Sid killed Nancy – he was probably hungry and had a delirious vision of her as a hamburger. Arthur Miller was probably bored into writing that play and I bet Leonard and Janis's bed was unmade when they arrived.