

SOUTHGATE

MATT AND TOM OLDFIELD

ULTIMATE  
FOOTBALL HEROES

# SOUTHGATE

FROM THE PLAYGROUND  
TO THE PITCH



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*For all readers,  
young and old(er)*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	9
CHAPTER 1 – <b>WINNING AND LOSING TOGETHER</b> .....	11
CHAPTER 2 – <b>THE BOY WITH THE BIG ENGLAND DREAM</b> ...	18
CHAPTER 3 – <b>STARTING OUT AT SOUTHAMPTON</b> .....	23
CHAPTER 4 – <b>BOUNCING BACK AT PALACE</b> .....	28
CHAPTER 5 – <b>THE RIGHT FIT FOR PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL?</b> .....	32
CHAPTER 6 – <b>A PREMIER LEAGUE PLAYER: PART I</b> .....	38
CHAPTER 7 – <b>CAPTAIN COMEBACK</b> .....	44
CHAPTER 8 – <b>A PREMIER LEAGUE PLAYER: PART II</b> .....	50
CHAPTER 9 – <b>VILLA’S BRILLIANT BACK THREE</b> .....	56



CHAPTER 10 – EURO 96: ENGLAND DREAM COME TRUE . . . .	62
CHAPTER 11 – EURO 96: PENALTY PAIN . . . . .	70
CHAPTER 12 – CAPTAIN CONSISTENT . . . . .	76
CHAPTER 13 – 1998, 2000: MORE ENGLAND MISERY . . . . .	82
CHAPTER 14 – MOVING TO... MIDDLESBROUGH! . . . . .	89
CHAPTER 15 – CAPTAIN INCREDIBLE . . . . .	95
CHAPTER 16 – A FINAL FAREWELL . . . . .	102
CHAPTER 17 – MIDDLESBROUGH’S NEW MANAGER . . . . .	107
CHAPTER 18 – WORKING WITH ENGLAND’S RISING STARS . . . . .	116
CHAPTER 19 – FROM ENGLAND JUNIORS TO SENIORS . . .	124
CHAPTER 20 – WORLD CUP 2018: A BRAVE NEW ENGLAND ERA . . . . .	131
CHAPTER 21 – A NEW FORMATION IN THE NATIONS LEAGUE . . . . .	142
CHAPTER 22 – EURO 2020: ANOTHER EXCITING STEP FORWARD . . . . .	149



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Okay, onto friends and family. I wouldn’t be writing this series if it wasn’t for my brother Tom. I owe him



## SOUTHGATE

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## CHAPTER 1

# WINNING AND LOSING TOGETHER

*11 July 2021, Wembley Stadium*

As the second half of extra-time ticked by, it was clear that the Euro 2020 final was only going to end in one way: with a penalty shoot-out. Everyone knew it; the exhausted players out on the pitch, the 67,000 anxious supporters in the stands, and especially the two managers on the touchline.

Yes, for England's Gareth Southgate and Italy's Roberto Mancini it was decision time. Who would take their team's first five penalties, and in what order? After hours and hours of practice at St George's Park, Gareth had worked out the answer to both of



those questions, but there was just one problem: two of England's best takers were still sitting on the bench. So, with only seconds to go, he made a bold double substitution:

Marcus Rashford on for Jordan Henderson,  
And Jadon Sancho on for Kyle Walker.

Right, now they were ready for penalties! Moments later, when the referee blew the final whistle, Gareth had a quick chat with his assistant, Steve Holland, and then gathered his tired players together for one last team-talk.

'You should be all so proud of what you've achieved so far,' he told them, 'but now it's time for one last push. We can do this, we can win this!'

*Come onnnnnnnnnnnnn!*

After his own painful penalty experience twenty-five years earlier, as an England player at Euro 96, Gareth had worked hard to prepare his players for such a high-pressure situation. In the semi-final shoot-out against Germany, he had been brave enough to step up and take his team's sixth spot-kick, but without any practice, Gareth Southgate had struck the ball straight



at the keeper.

Now, however, everything was different. Gareth had made sure that the England players knew exactly what they needed to do:

Stay calm, stay positive, stick to the plan, *SCORE!*

And what they needed to NOT do:

*PANIC!*

Plus, they had the confidence of knowing that they had succeeded before. At the 2018 World Cup, Gareth had led England to their first penalty shoot-out win in twenty-five years, against Colombia. They had done it once, and now they could do it again. The England manager believed in every single one of his heroes:

1) Harry Kane... placed his penalty in the bottom corner where the Italian keeper, Gianluigi Donnarumma, couldn't reach it. *GOAL!*

'Yessssss!' Gareth roared, punching the air with passion. While the England players stood united on the halfway line, he stood with his coaches on the sidelines. It was one big team effort – they won together and they lost together.



When Jordan Pickford saved Italy's second spot-kick to give England the advantage, Gareth didn't show any emotion at all. It was too early, and he was too experienced, to get carried away just yet.

2) Harry Maguire... blasted an unstoppable shot into the top corner. *GOAL!*

Gareth punched the air again – it was all going according to plan for England so far. Their next two takers, however, were the last-minute substitutes, who had barely kicked a ball during the game. It was a risky move from the England manager – would it turn out to be a touch of genius or a massive mistake?

3) Marcus Rashford... clipped the outside of the post. *MISS!*

4) Jadon Sancho... aimed for the bottom corner, but Donnarumma dived the right way. *SAVED!*

On the sidelines, Gareth did his best to hide his disappointment, but on the inside, his heart had sunk right to the bottom of his stomach. It was all his fault; his plan had failed.

It really didn't look good for England, especially as Jorginho was next up for Italy. The midfielder



almost always scored from the spot, but not this time, because Jordan dived down to make a super save.

*Come onnnnnnnnnnnnnnn!*

Phew – England were still in the Euro 2020 final shoot-out, but they had to score their fifth penalty. So, who would take it? Raheem Sterling? Jack Grealish? No – instead, Gareth had given that huge responsibility to his youngest player.

5) Bukayo Saka... aimed for the same bottom corner as Jadon, but Donnarumma dived the right way again. *SAVED!*

*Nooooooooooooo!*

It was all over and Italy, not England, were the Euro 2020 winners. As the *Azzurri* players celebrated, Gareth went over to comfort the three devastated Young Lions, Marcus, Jadon and Bukayo. He was a manager who cared deeply about his players.

'I know it really hurts right now, but you'll come back stronger than ever,' he told them, speaking from experience. 'Remember, we win together and lose together. It was my decision for you to take that penalty and you were brave enough to step forward





when I asked you to. So, be proud of yourself and don't worry, we'll be back!

At the post-match press conference, Gareth began by taking full responsibility for the defeat: 'Penalties are my call. We worked in training. It's not down to the players. Tonight it hasn't gone for us. We know they were the best takers we had left on the pitch. Of course it's going to be heartbreaking for the boys, but they are not to blame for that.'

Gareth wasn't the kind of person, or manager, who liked to dwell on disappointments, though; instead, he preferred to focus on the positives. 'The players have given everything and I'm proud of them,' he said at the end. 'They've got to walk away from here heads held high. They've done more than any team in the last fifty years.'

Yes, although they hadn't quite managed to bring football home, Gareth's England squad had succeeded in giving the country plenty to cheer about. With their winning smiles, strong principles, and superb performances on the pitch, they had united the nation during Euro 2020, just like they had during the 2018



World Cup. It was a summer that none of them would ever forget, but this wasn't the end; no, it was only just the beginning.

Under Gareth's guidance, England were making real progress, and moving in the right direction – semi-finalists at the 2018 World Cup, finalists at Euro 2020... What next – World Cup winners?

Why not? Even at the age of fifty, Gareth was still the same boy with the big England dream.

