

# **Fever Pitch Study Guide**

## **Fever Pitch by Nick Hornby**

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## Plot Summary

Fever Pitch is a nonfiction memoir by Nick Hornby, an English writer, that details his obsession with the Arsenal football team. His father takes Nick to his first Arsenal game as a way to bond after leaving Nick's mother for another woman. Nick begins going to every game he can, and his interest soon becomes an obsession. He feels uneasy when he watches the games and learns that despair and disappointment are familiar feelings to football fans. Nick's dad moves out of the country, and Nick begins going to games with a boy known as Rat, the older brother of one of his classmates. They can't afford to sit in the good seats in the West Stand, so they stand throughout the games in a section called the Schoolboy's Enclosure. As a teenager, Nick attends an away match for Arsenal, and after watching the replay, learns he was on camera. He sees that he looks very serious watching the game, more than the other children around him. He realizes he was obsessed and obsessions aren't funny but doesn't learn to relax at games until he is older. Before a 1972 cup semifinal match, Nick meets one of the Arsenal players, Bob McNab. Nick also goes to see a final cup match in 1972. Leeds wins 1-0, and Nick doesn't understand how he could go through this again.

Nick Hornby turns fifteen and moves to the North Bank, where Arsenal's most vocal supporters stand. Nick Hornsby has his first girlfriend, Carol, but she eventually dumps him right before a game; however, he is thankful she helped him see there is a life outside of football. Nick enrolls at Cambridge University and attends some games of Cambridge United. He coasts through university without making much of a mark. He would like to write for a living, but as he didn't pursue writing for the college newspaper while in school, he thinks he doesn't have a chance to get a writing job. Arsenal loses two Cup finals in a row, and Nick feels stricken. He knows he needs to do something with his life and enrolls in teacher's college. Through his twenties, Nick falls into a depression and in his twenties, sees a psychiatrist because he's frustrated that he can't find a job he wants to do. Arsenal beats Tottenham in the Littlewoods Cup semifinals in 1987, and this lifts Nick Hornby out of a decade-long downward spiral. Nick gets a job with a trading company. Nick buys a season ticket for the seated section in 1989. He feels this is a sign of growing up. Nick begins to play football with friends on a regular basis. As he goes to Arsenal games as an adult, he feels like he has come full circle.



## **Introduction, Sunday, 14th July 1991; Home Debut, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 14.9.68; and A Spare Jimmy Husband, Arsenal v. West Ham, 26.10.68**

### **Introduction, Sunday, 14th July 1991; Home Debut, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 14.9.68; and A Spare Jimmy Husband, Arsenal v. West Ham, 26.10.68 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby's nonfiction memoir recounts his love of football (what Americans know as soccer), from when he was a young boy in England. In the introduction, it is a Sunday morning in 1991, and Nick and his girlfriend are drinking tea while lying in bed talking. Nick begins to daydream about football, even though it is not the football season. His girlfriend asks what he is thinking about and he lies to hide his obsession. He frequently finds himself lost in football fantasies about the English football team Arsenal. This memoir is a way to come to terms with his obsession and discuss what it means to be a football fan. (Home Debut, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 14.9.68) Nick's parents are divorced, and just after his eleventh birthday in 1968, his father takes him to a match at Highbury, Arsenal's home field, when he truly becomes interested in football. His father would take Nick out one day a week, usually a week-day, making it hard for them to find something to do. Nick finds himself enthralled with the team and the amount of people who attend the game. He notices that most of the men attending seem to hate being there and hate the players. Arsenal wins the game and Nick falls in love with the team, despite his father's efforts to steer him towards a more successful team. (A Spare Jimmy Husband, Arsenal v. West Ham, 26.10.68) Nick gets a soccer star's album and he and his friends trade and collect stickers of the players; his love of football helps him fit in.

Analysis: Nick Hornby's passion for football is a critical and ever-present part of his life. When his father first offers to take him to a game, Nick refuses but later watches the game on television as a way to spite his father. This shows he is still angry about his parents' divorce. Nick isn't close to his father, since he only sees him about once a week and seems uncomfortable hanging out with his father. Going to football games together is the first activity that begins to bring them closer. During his first game, Nick is astonished at how many people seem to hate being there, which foreshadows his eventual relationship with the team. Football is a way for Nick to bond with his peers.



## **Don Rogers, Swindon Town v. Arsenal (at Wembley), 15.3.69; England! England v. Scotland, May 1969; and Camping, Arsenal v. Everton, 7.8.69**

### **Don Rogers, Swindon Town v. Arsenal (at Wembley), 15.3.69; England! England v. Scotland, May 1969; and Camping, Arsenal v. Everton, 7.8.69 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby and his father go to see Arsenal several more times. Nick finds himself taking each win and loss that he sees personally. When his mom leaves him a note with the score of a game Arsenal lost, Nick feels betrayed by her. Arsenal is playing for the League Cup against Swindon Town. Swindon Town beats Arsenal in overtime. It is Nick's first experience with opposing fans. Nick gets angry because his father assured him Arsenal would win and Nick walks away as soon as the game is over. His dad yells at Nick when his dad catches up about his lack of sportsmanship. At school, kids tease him about Arsenal's loss and he feels alone. (England! England v. Scotland, May 1969) Nick goes with his father to see the English national team play at Wembley, England's main football stadium. (Camping, Arsenal v. Everton, 7.8.69) Nick misses the opening game next season because he is at scout camp. He is homesick and tells the counselors he is upset about his parent's divorce instead of admitting he misses his mother and sister. His father talks to him, reassuring him that they will go to more football games that year. When they hear that Arsenal lost a game against Everton, his father agrees to take him home.

Analysis: Nick's obsession with Arsenal is starting to take shape, and he begins to take the team's ups and downs personally. He feels betrayed by his parents when they do not shield him from the bad news of the team's losses. This illustrates how his feelings are irrationally tangled up with Arsenal's fortunes. He also gets teased at school, which only reinforces the idea that loving football brings misery. Nick begins to think he knows more than the team manager, as countless other fans do. This can be seen as a rite of passage into true "fandom." When he is taken to camp, it is clear that his main concern is missing his mother and sister, although he also misses football. He is eager to use the divorce as an excuse to go home, but it is one of the reasons he does not want to stay at camp.



## **Boring, Boring Arsenal, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 27.12.69; Pele, Brazil v. Chechoslovakia, June 1970; Thumped, Arsenal v. Derby, 31.10.70; and Can You See Me on the Box? Southampton v. Arsenal, 10.4.71**

### **Boring, Boring Arsenal, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 27.12.69; Pele, Brazil v. Chechoslovakia, June 1970; Thumped, Arsenal v. Derby, 31.10.70; and Can You See Me on the Box? Southampton v. Arsenal, 10.4.71 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby begins to feel guilty because his father doesn't really like Arsenal and would prefer to take Nick to see another team. However, loyalty to a team cannot be switched, and even though Arsenal is boring, Nick can't support a different team. (Pele, Brazil v. Chechoslovakia, June 1970) Brazilian player Pele is regarded as the greatest player in the world, although Nick and the other English fans don't know much about him. (Thumped, Arsenal v. Derby, 31.10.70) Nick's dad moves out of the country and Nick begins going to games with a boy, Rat, the older brother of one of his classmates. They stand in a section called the Schoolboy's Enclosure. Many of the other kids in the section are tough. Nick and Rat leave a game early, and two boys follow them out and chase them, stealing Nick's scarf. No adults stop to help him. Nick doesn't tell his mom because she won't let him go to games. (Can You See Me on the Box? Southampton v. Arsenal, 10.4.71) Nick attends an away match for Arsenal and after watching the replay learns he is on camera. He looks serious watching the game, more than the other child around him. He realizes he is obsessed, and obsessions aren't funny, but he doesn't learn to relax at games until he is older.

Analysis: Nick's obsession is starting to take his toll on family members. He knows his dad doesn't like Arsenal, and while he says true football fans can't switch teams once they are involved, it also seems he enjoys making his dad suffer somewhat by making his dad go to Arsenal games. Nick is getting older and goes to games with a friend. The two stand out among the ruffians as they are nice, middle-class boys, and Nick is again faced with the feeling he doesn't fit in. They get in a brawl, but Nick is more worried about what his mother will think than about the loss of his scarf. It shows that football can be more important to Nick than his personal safety. He gets a rare chance to reflect

on his demeanor when he sees himself on television and realizes how serious he looks. He knows it will take years before he is able to lighten up about football.





## **How I Won the Double, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 17.4.71; Another City, Chelsea v. Tottenham, January 1972; Islington Boy, Reading v. Arsenal, 5.2.72; and Happy, Arsenal v. Derby, 12.2.72**

### **How I Won the Double, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 17.4.71; Another City, Chelsea v. Tottenham, January 1972; Islington Boy, Reading v. Arsenal, 5.2.72; and Happy, Arsenal v. Derby, 12.2.72 Summary and Analysis**

(How I Won the Double, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 17.4.71) Arsenal finally wins a cup game after seventeen years, the League Championship game and the FA Cup. Nick feels disconnected to these victories since he wasn't there. He does feel he has a hand in the game against Newcastle in 1971 since he attended that game, and Arsenal would not have done as well if he had been absent. (Another City, Chelsea v. Tottenham, January 1972) Nick feels his father should be supporting Chelsea, a more flamboyant team. (Islington Boy, Reading v. Arsenal, 5.2.72) Nick is dissatisfied with his life in the London suburbs. When Reading plays Arsenal, Nick starts talking to a family near him who thinks he is from London because of his accent. He enjoys speaking with them until they ask where he lives, and he confesses he lives close. The father tells him he should support his local team, not Arsenal. (Happy, Arsenal v. Derby, 12.2.72) In order to be happy after a football game, Nick has several conditions for the perfect game, including going with his dad, eating lunch before the game, and the game being filmed for television. Nick feels bad because his dad forgets to bring a coat but doesn't let that stop him from staying to the games' end. The only time all his conditions occur together is during an Arsenal game in 1972. Nick builds this game up in his mind as the perfect game.

Analysis: For Nick, football becomes a place where he can embrace his depressive thoughts. The atmosphere at the football matches is tense, as most of the fans live in a constant cloud of disappointment. Nick also likes that he is a more cosmopolitan, posher version of himself at games. Football allows him to escape the worries of his life by focusing on the worries of the team. He sets up many conditions for him to be happy after a game, making them unreasonable so each game has little chance of fulfilling the criteria. Nick's choice to stay as an Arsenal supporter instead of going with his dad to see Chelsea, shows he feels his dad needs more stability and substance in his life. Nick rebels against the flashy team much like he rebels against his father. He feels bad for

making his dad stand in the cold without a coat, but to him, football is much more important than his father's comfort.



## **My Mum and Charlie George, Derby County v. Arsenal, 26.2.72; Social History, Arsenal v. Derby, 29.2.72; Me and Bob McNab, Stoke City v. Arsenal, (Villa Park), 5.4.72; and Wembley II - The Nightmare Continues, Leeds v. Arsenal, 5.5.72**

### **My Mum and Charlie George, Derby County v. Arsenal, 26.2.72; Social History, Arsenal v. Derby, 29.2.72; Me and Bob McNab, Stoke City v. Arsenal, (Villa Park), 5.4.72; and Wembley II - The Nightmare Continues, Leeds v. Arsenal, 5.5.72 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby's mom is supportive of his interest in football, even buying him tickets. When he goes to games on Saturdays, his mom always asks how the game was, and Nick realizes he is playing the role of man of the house. When Nick arrives with other Arsenal fans at an away game, they are greeted by a cadre of police who escort them to the stadium. Nick enjoys being thought of as a hooligan as the fans sing loudly and frighten shoppers along the route to the stadium. When Arsenal plays Derby, Arsenal player Charlie George runs over to the Derby fans and makes obscene gestures. George got booed off the field and fined by the League. Nick and the other fans were chased to their train by the Derby fans. (Social History, Arsenal v. Derby, 29.2.72) When the game is replayed, it is during a power workers' strike and most people don't have electricity, but still many fans turn out. (Me and Bob McNab, Stoke City v. Arsenal, (Villa Park), 5.4.72) Before a 1972 FA Cup semifinal match, Nick meets one of the Arsenal players, Bob McNab. He was attending the game with Hislam, a would-be hooligan who lives near Nick. Nick sees Bob when they are there early for tickets and asks him if he's playing; Bob says yeah. Nick is satisfied not saying much to the players since he knows they will likely be playing for another team in the near future. (Wembley II - The Nightmare Continues, Leeds v. Arsenal, 5.5.72). During a final cup match, Leeds wins 1-0, and Nick doesn't understand how he could go through this again.

Analysis: Nick wants a time-out from what he thinks of as his "dorky" self. He likes that attending football matches allows him to be a cooler version of himself. When he attends an away game, he is lumped in with the tougher hooligans who are always ready to fight. This makes him feel dangerous and he enjoys the feeling, even when the



fans chase them after the game against Derby. Nick doesn't speak to players much when he sees them. He says that doing so would be like an old man hitting on a woman, creating a needlessly awkward atmosphere. He knows that the players are not as important as the whole team. He also faces his biggest disappointment yet when he goes to his first cup final and Arsenal doesn't win. He wonders how he can do this again, foreshadowing the many cup losses he will see as he gets older and becomes more involved with the team.



## **A New Family, Arsenal v. Wolves, 15.8.72; A Matter of Life and Death, Crystal Palace v. Liverpool, October 1972; Graduation Day, Arsenal v. Ipswich, 14.10.72; and The Whole Package, Arsenal v. Coventry, 4.11.72**

### **A New Family, Arsenal v. Wolves, 15.8.72; A Matter of Life and Death, Crystal Palace v. Liverpool, October 1972; Graduation Day, Arsenal v. Ipswich, 14.10.72; and The Whole Package, Arsenal v. Coventry, 4.11.72 Summary and Analysis**

Arsenal begins playing a new, more continental style of football. Nick Hornby finds this disconcerting, but it seems to work since Arsenal begins winning. Nick recently met his stepmother and two half-siblings, and is unsure of his family situation. His stepmother comes to a football game in England, and Nick feels as if his realities are joining. Arsenal wins that game by a large margin, and Nick feels as if the world has gone mad. However, Arsenal soon loses and returns to their old ways. (A Matter of Life and Death, Crystal Palace v. Liverpool, October 1972) Nick sees a dead body after a game when a man keels over in the street. Nick hopes he doesn't die in mid-season but wouldn't mind having his ashes spread at Highbury. However, he doesn't want to die right after a game. (Graduation Day, Arsenal v. Ipswich, 14.10.72) Nick turns fifteen and moves to the North Bank, where Arsenal's most vocal supporters stand. (The Whole Package, Arsenal v. Coventry, 4.11.72) The crowd is rougher in the North Bank and frequently chant and taunt the opposing team during football matches. Nick finds himself joining in for the first time during a match against Coventry. When he is older, he finds himself embarrassed by this. Nick thinks that women have a tough time not stereotyping men, since a colleague couldn't believe he would read a feminist novel and also watch Arsenal.

Analysis: Nick is coming to terms with his father's new family. He has spent some time with them in France and England and is coming to accept the meshing of these two different aspects of his life when his stepmother attends a game with them. Now that he is getting older, he feels it is time to graduate to the the North Bank, where the adults stands. This is a serious rite of passage for Nick, even though it seems trivial. The fact that this means so much to him shows how important football is to his life. However, he finds it silly when he thinks about himself chanting along with the other fans, even

though it was a necessary part of his passage into adulthood and serious fandom. Like many fanatics, Nick also contemplates how Arsenal will tie into his death, showing that his obsession may be unhealthy.



**Carol Blackburn, Arsenal v. Derby, 31.3.73; Goodbye to All That, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 4.10.75; My Second Childhood, Arsenal v. Bristol City, 21.8.76; Supermac, Arsenal v. Everton, 18.9.76; and A Fourth Division Town, Cambridge United v. Darlington,**

**Carol Blackburn, Arsenal v. Derby, 31.3.73; Goodbye to All That, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 4.10.75; My Second Childhood, Arsenal v. Bristol City, 21.8.76; Supermac, Arsenal v. Everton, 18.9.76; and A Fourth Division Town, Cambridge United v. Darlington, 29.1.77 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby's girlfriend of about a month, Carol Blackburn, dumps him right before a game against Derby. Arsenal loses the game, and Nick again sees it as a metaphor for his feelings. However, Carol did give Nick a life outside of football, and he is grateful for that. (Goodbye to All That, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 4.10.75) Nick stops going to Arsenal games over the next few years. Nick begins to get interested in girls and spends his time working so he can make money to go out with them. Nick's uncle Brian asks him to attend an Arsenal game with him and his son, Michael. During the game, Nick finds himself disconnected and knows his time loving football is over. (My Second Childhood, Arsenal v. Bristol City, 21.8.76) Nick Hornby finds himself back at the Arsenal stadium the next year when a new owner takes over and buys a new player, Malcolm MacDonald. Nick works in an insurance company after high school in an effort to be a part of London life, but finds it boring. He returns to following football with his workmates. (Supermac, Arsenal v. Everton, 18.9.76) Nick finds MacDonald is a showboat since he frequently takes credit for goals that he didn't really have a hand in. (A Fourth Division Town, Cambridge United v. Darlington, 29.1.77) Nick applies to Cambridge University and attends some games of Cambridge United. He finds the experience fascinating, since Cambridge United is a smaller, lower division team that have only been playing a few years. He makes friends at college who are also soccer fans, which is like going to grammar school all over again. Nick coasts through university, passing through without making much of a mark on the school. He admits he is scared of the place and football is his way of coping with it.



Analysis: Nick is beginning to worry that he has no interests outside of football; he feels that cannot be a healthy attitude. Therefore, even though his first girlfriend, Carol, dumps him, he is grateful because the pain has made him realize there is a world outside football. It looks as though he has escaped his obsession until he takes the job at the insurance company. The work there is so boring that football is the only distraction the workers have, and Nick is soon drawn back into the world. It is his second initiation into it, and this parallels the first time he fell in love with soccer when he and his friends obsessed over it together. Nick eventually realizes he needs to try to do something with his life and applies to Cambridge, finding a new team to love in Cambridge United. That team acts as a surrogate for Arsenal, showing that Nick now needs some kind of football in his life to distract him from everyday worries.





**Boys and Girls, Arsenal v. Leicester City, 2.4.77; Just Like a Woman, Cambridge United v. Exeter City, 29.4.78; Wembley III - The Horror Returns, Arsenal v. Ipswich (at Wembley), 6.5.78; and Sugar Mice and Buzzcocks Albums, Cambridge United v. Orient, 4.1**

**Boys and Girls, Arsenal v. Leicester City, 2.4.77; Just Like a Woman, Cambridge United v. Exeter City, 29.4.78; Wembley III - The Horror Returns, Arsenal v. Ipswich (at Wembley), 6.5.78; and Sugar Mice and Buzzcocks Albums, Cambridge United v. Orient, 4.11.78 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby falls in love with a girl from a teacher college. She is his first serious girlfriend and the first to come to Arsenal play with Nick at Highbury. She finds the experience funny, especially when everyone stands up as soon as a goal is scored. By dating her, Nick realizes that girls are quirkiest than boys, and her interests are much more eclectic than his. He thinks women don't get as obsessed with one thing as men do. (Just Like a Woman, Cambridge United v. Exeter City, 29.4.78) Nick goes to Cambridge United games with his girlfriend. During a game against Exeter City, his girlfriend faints, but Nick stays at the game while her other friend takes her to the medics. Nick only feels bad after the game and wonders what kind of person football has turned him into. (Wembley III - The Horror Returns, Arsenal v. Ipswich (at Wembley), 6.5.78) Arsenal loses 1-0 in the 1978 FA Cup, and it is the third time Nick has seen Arsenal lose a cup final at Wembley. The men next to him don't really care about the game, and Nick thinks it is interesting to sit next to them and see people who are not involved in the game. (Sugar Mice and Buzzcocks Albums, Cambridge United v. Orient, 4.11.78) One of Nick's friends buys a sugar mouse candy one day and drops it in the road before eating it all. Cambridge United wins that day, and it becomes a tradition for Nick and his friends to drop a sugar mouse in the road each time to ensure victory. Nick realizes rituals like this are silly, but fans and players everywhere have their good luck rituals to ensure winning games.



Analysis: Nick has begun analyzing his obsession and can see the difference between men's interests and women's interests. No matter how much a woman obsesses over something, Nick believes they cannot reach the level of single-minded worship that men have for their obsessions. When Nick comes in contact with people who are not as involved with the team as he is, he treats them like an exotic creature and wishes he could embrace their light-hearted, mild interest. Nick also discusses the rituals fans and players go through to ensure a winning game, such as biting the head of sugar mice because the team won a game after that was done once. This illustrates the ludicrous lengths that superstitious people will go to when trying to ensure a win for their team.



**Wembley IV - The Catharsis, Arsenal v. Manchester United (at Wembley), 12.5.79; Filling a Hole, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 1.5.80; Liam Brady, Arsenal v. Nottingham Forest, 5.5.80; Arsenalesque, West Ham v. Arsenal, 10.5.80; Life After Football, Arsenal v. Va**

**Wembley IV - The Catharsis, Arsenal v. Manchester United (at Wembley), 12.5.79; Filling a Hole, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 1.5.80; Liam Brady, Arsenal v. Nottingham Forest, 5.5.80; Arsenalesque, West Ham v. Arsenal, 10.5.80; Life After Football, Arsenal v. Valencia, 14.5.80; and Part of the Game, Arsenal v. Southampton, 19.8.80 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby graduates from college but has no ambition to do anything. He would like to write for a living, but he didn't pursue writing while in school. Arsenal again makes it into the FA Cup, and this time they win. He gets his degree and realizes that the most he ever wanted to achieve in life is watching Arsenal win the FA Cup. (Filling a Hole, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 1.5.80) Nick thinks of years in terms of football seasons, not calendar years. He feels burnt out when Arsenal makes it to the FA Cup yet again. (Liam Brady, Arsenal v. Nottingham Forest, 5.5.80) Nick Hornby is afraid Liam Brady is going to be sold to another team. Nick becomes fixated on Brady, a mid-field player, because Brady is a good passer and intelligent player. Brady eventually leaves Arsenal. Nick's girlfriend later leaves him, and Nick gets the two muddled up in his mind. (Arsenalesque, West Ham v. Arsenal, 10.5.80) Arsenal and Arsenal fans are disliked greatly by other football fans, while West Ham is loved. When a player makes a bad foul during a game against West Ham, Nick finds himself enjoying Arsenal's rebellious nature. (Life After Football, Arsenal v. Valencia, 14.5.80) Arsenal loses two Cup finals in a row, and Nick feels stricken. He vows to never let football to replace life completely again. (Part of the Game, Arsenal v. Southampton, 19.8.80) Nick goes to an Arsenal game, but something happens to block the flow of people and there is a huge crush outside the entrance. Nick has a hard time breathing and takes a moment to recover once inside, but he is not afraid because he believes the police have the situation under control. He doesn't understand until later that it was mostly luck that he was not harmed.



Analysis: Nick gets out of college but doesn't have a clear idea of what he wants to do besides attend Arsenal games. Going to the games is the one constant in his life and is always there for him no matter what happens. When his girlfriend leaves, Nick fills the hole in his heart by turning to Arsenal and even succeeds in mixing up his feelings for his lost girlfriend with those for Liam Brady, a player who leaves the team. Nick realizes this is irrational, but it helps him get through the break-up. He realizes when Arsenal wins the FA Cup that football's impression on him may be more damaging than he knows. However, he can't give it up. Nick also has the misfortune to be a fan of the most hated team in football. However, he takes this as a plus when he finds himself enjoying their antics. When Nick is caught up in a crush of people, he trusts that the police have everything under control even though they don't. He begins to show that clubs are failing to meet the demands of the large crowds at the stadium, and foreshadows that someone will soon be hurt by this.



**My Brother, Arsenal v. Tottenham, 30.8.80; Clowns, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 13.9.80; Same Old Arsenal, Arsenal v. Brighton, 1.11.80; A Trivial Pursuit, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 24.2.81; Coach, My School v. Their School, January 1982; On the Pitch, Arsenal**

**My Brother, Arsenal v. Tottenham, 30.8.80; Clowns, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 13.9.80; Same Old Arsenal, Arsenal v. Brighton, 1.11.80; A Trivial Pursuit, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 24.2.81; Coach, My School v. Their School, January 1982; On the Pitch, Arsenal v. West Ham, 1.5.82; and The Munsters and Quentin Crisp, Saffron Walden v. Tiptree, May 1983 Summary and Analysis**

Nick is afraid that his future son will end up supporting Tottenham, one of Arsenal's biggest rivals. Nick takes his half-brother, Jonathan, to Arsenal games with him. Jonathan is captivated by the violence in the stands and becomes an Arsenal fan. Nick finds this funny because he himself wouldn't have been an Arsenal fan if his father hadn't left his mother. (Clowns, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 13.9.80) Arsenal doesn't do well during the rest of 1980. He finds himself suffering when Arsenal does badly, unable to do anything about their slide. (Same Old Arsenal, Arsenal v. Brighton, 1.11.80) Nick goes to the game with Jonathan and his dad, the last time he goes with his dad. He feels as though an era has ended, since he is now closer to his father and they do not need football to bring them together. (A Trivial Pursuit, Arsenal v. Manchester City, 24.2.81) Nick gets lost again over the next few years, breaking up with a girlfriend and beginning teaching practice in a tough school. Arsenal is also doing badly, but the games distract him from his life. The one student who loves Arsenal is contemptuous of Nick, so Nick quizzes him to prove he knows more about the team. The boy accepts that Nick knows what he is talking about and they connect but is disturbed that he had to challenge him.



(Coach, My School v. Their School, January 1982) Nick becomes a coach at the school, and feels silly when he realizes he is much more enthusiastic than is warranted. (On the Pitch, Arsenal v. West Ham, 1.5.82) Nick takes a friend's son to a game and shows him where trouble is likely to break out from visiting fans invading the home stadium but says they should be safe. However, a fight breaks out behind them and they are forced to jump onto the field to escape. An Arsenal fan is stabbed after the game. When back in class, Nick argues that dressing like a hooligan only feeds the culture of violence, but it is lost on the kids. (The Munsters and Quentin Crisp, Saffron Walden v. Tiptree, May 1983) Nick knows that part of the attraction of football is watching the other people there, many of whom are mad. Nick goes to a non-league game and is touched by how friendly and accessible a small team is.

Analysis: Nick's worst fear is that he will have a son who supports another team, mostly because he cannot trust himself not to rub it in his son's face if his son's team loses. Nick finds this appalling about himself but has to face the inevitable. He also shows his intolerance when he quizzes the Arsenal fan in his class room. He is unable to suffer insults about his devotion to the team, but he realizes this is a problem he needs to work on. When he coaches the kids in his school, he finds himself overreacting to their achievements and losses as well. Nick also becomes closer to his half-brother and dad when attending Arsenal games with them. Football has been there to bring their family together time and time again. Nick also begins to find the culture of violence that surrounds football and the hooligans distasteful, and thus begins his disillusionment with the soccer culture.



**Charlie Nicholas, Arsenal v. Luton, 27.8.83, A Seven-Month Hiccup, Cambridge United v. Oldham Athletic, 1.10.83; Coconuts, Cambridge United v. Newcastle United, 28.4.84; Pete, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 22.9.84; Heysel, Liverpool v. Juventus, 29.5.85; Dying o**

**Charlie Nicholas, Arsenal v. Luton, 27.8.83, A Seven-Month Hiccup, Cambridge United v. Oldham Athletic, 1.10.83; Coconuts, Cambridge United v. Newcastle United, 28.4.84; Pete, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 22.9.84; Heysel, Liverpool v. Juventus, 29.5.85; Dying on its Feet, Arsenal v. Leicester, 31.8.85; Drinking Again, Arsenal v. Hereford, 8.10.85; The Pits, Aston Villa v. Arsenal, 22.1. 86, Arsenal v. Aston Villa, 4.2.86; and Freeing the Log-Jam, Arsenal v. Watford, 31.3.86  
Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby quits teaching to become a writer the same time Charlie Nicholas joins Arsenal. His successes and failures as a writer mirror Nicholas' successes and failures on the field. Both end up not succeeding, and the existing manager is fired for getting Charlie for Arsenal. Nick realizes he is now older than most of the Arsenal players, and the age gap will only get wider. (A Seven-Month Hiccup, Cambridge United v. Oldham Athletic, 1.10.83) After a win against Oldham, Cambridge fails to win again for thirty-one games. (Coconuts, Cambridge United v. Newcastle United, 28.4.84) Nick goes to his last Cambridge United game, deciding to go back to Arsenal and strengthen his relationship there. (Pete, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 22.9.84) Nick Hornby is introduced to Pete, a fellow Arsenal fan, and they get along well. Nick says Pete has kept him supporting Arsenal, even at times when he may have drifted away from the team, missing fewer than six games in seven years. (Heysel, Liverpool v. Juventus, 29.5.85) Nick is working in London, teaching English as a foreign language. He and his Italian students sit down to watch Liverpool play Juventus, an Italian team, in Heysel, Belgium. The English fans run at the Italian fans, who don't understand this is a tradition in



England, and several people are crushed to death in the panic when a wall collapses, killing several.

(Dying on its Feet, Arsenal v. Leicester, 31.8.85) After the tragedy in Belgium, Nick Hornby feels ashamed of the whole thing and even apologizes on behalf of Liverpool fans to one of his students, a young Italian woman who is a Juventus fan. Football has always seemed transcendental to Nick, but the tragedy has ruined this. (Drinking Again, Arsenal v. Hereford, 8.10.85) Since most think that alcohol played a role in the tragedy in Belgium, the football leagues ban alcohol during the game, but the clubs protest since they would lose the revenue. The ban is lifted. (Aston Villa v. Arsenal, 22.1. 86, Arsenal v. Aston Villa, 4.2.86) Nick uses Arsenal games to cheer him up when life looks bleak, but a loss against Aston Villa convinces him that until Arsenal turns their losing streak around, he cannot be happy. He calls his girlfriend, who comforts him. (Freeing the Log-Jam, Arsenal v. Watford, 31.3.86) Nick's girlfriend comes with him to the next game, and it is clear the team has reached the bottom. Nick is happy his girlfriend can see that others also care just as irrationally about football.

Analysis: Nick again sees his life mirrored in the fortunes of the team. He quits teaching to concentrate on writing at the same time Charlie Nicholas joins Arsenal, and Nicholas' career path mimics Nick's. While he still watches Cambridge United, their long string of losses doesn't seem to have much of an effect. Nick doesn't even think of abandoning the team because they are losing and realizes the team's record doesn't actually matter to him in the long run. When the people are killed during a crowd rush, Nick finds himself ashamed of his countrymen and fellow football fans, since he knows it could have just as easily been Arsenal fans who caused the mayhem. When the stadiums abandon serving alcohol near the field, Nick sees it as a concession for the deaths, but when it costs the club money the idea is nixed. This foreshadows that another tragedy may occur since the actual root of the problem hasn't been addressed.





**George, Arsenal v. Manchester United, 23.8.86; A Male Fantasy, Arsenal v. Charlton Athletic, 18.11.86; From NW3 to N17, Tottenham v. Arsenal, 4.3.87; Just Another Saturday, Chelsea v. Arsenal, 7.3.87; Golden, Arsenal v. Liverpool (at Wembley), 11.4.87; Ba**

**George, Arsenal v. Manchester United, 23.8.86; A Male Fantasy, Arsenal v. Charlton Athletic, 18.11.86; From NW3 to N17, Tottenham v. Arsenal, 4.3.87; Just Another Saturday, Chelsea v. Arsenal, 7.3.87; Golden, Arsenal v. Liverpool (at Wembley), 11.4.87; Bananas, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 15.8.87; and The King of Kenilworth Road, Luton v. Arsenal, 31.8.87 Summary and Analysis**

Nick's mother's two cats are named after football players, and his sister can name players and keeps her brother updated on soccer news. Arsenal gets a new coach, George Graham, a former player. Nick and his friend, Pete, finally face the inevitable and buy season tickets. Graham proves himself as a coach and Arsenal's fortunes start to turn. (A Male Fantasy, Arsenal v. Charlton Athletic, 18.11.86) Charlie meets his current girlfriend. She also becomes a fanatic and, when the relationship gets better, they begin competing to see who is the bigger fan. Nick is worried because she says they will alternate going to home games when they have kids, and Nick panics at the thought of missing games. Nick eventually wins when Arsenal loses a big game, and he is able to out-sulk her, forcing her to effectively admit that it's only a game. (From NW3 to N17, Tottenham v. Arsenal, 4.3.87) Nick sees a psychiatrist because he's frustrated that he can't find a job he wants to do. After a few months, his depression totally overcomes him. He is very disturbed by people yelling racist terms at football games, particularly Tottenham fans. Arsenal beats Tottenham in the Littlewoods Cup semifinals, and this lifts Nick out of a downward spiral.

(Just Another Saturday, Chelsea v. Arsenal, 7.3.87) Nick goes to see Arsenal play Chelsea, but they lose and the whole experience is so awful, but it had a perverse glory



that makes those that attend feel they deserve a medal. (Golden, Arsenal v. Liverpool (at Wembley), 11.4.87) Nick's depression is completely gone. He is almost thirty now and is looking forward to a bright future for Arsenal. Arsenal wins the Littlewoods Cup, and Nick feels it is a reward for his persistence. (Bananas, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 15.8.87) Nick's girlfriend is short, so they end up buying tickets in the higher levels. They see how racist Liverpool fans are, even throwing bananas on the field to mock an Arsenal player. Nick doesn't mind if the fans call the players derogatory names, as long as they aren't racist names. He wishes the players and clubs did more to stop the racism. (The King of Kenilworth Road, Luton v. Arsenal, 31.8.87) Nick's friend, Neil Kaas, is an even more fanatical football fan than Nick. He supports Luton and takes Nick to see them when they play Arsenal.

Analysis: Nick believes he has met his ultimate match, a woman who loves Arsenal just as much as he does. However, his joy soon turns to worry when the discussion turns to who will stay home with the kids when Arsenal has home games. Nick sees the loss of his home games as a threat and pulls out all the stops to ensure that he still gets to go. The fact that he and his girlfriend have this discussion even though children aren't yet on the horizon shows how much football has affected Nick's life and what kind of planning he must do to ensure it fits into his schedule. Nick's depressed state gets more pronounced as he notices more and more racist people at football games. Nick understands calling the players names, but he feels making racist comments is uncalled for and unfair. Nick also seems to enjoy comparing himself to Neil Kaas, taking comfort in the fact that there is someone more extreme in Arsenal's support than Nick.



## **My Ankle, Arsenal v. Wimbledon, 19.8.87; The Match, Coventry v. Arsenal, 13.12.87; No Apology Necessary, Arsenal v. Everton, 24.2.88; Welcome to England, England v. Holland, March 1988; and Gus Caesar, Arsenal v. Luton (at Wembley), 24.4.88**

### **My Ankle, Arsenal v. Wimbledon, 19.8.87; The Match, Coventry v. Arsenal, 13.12.87; No Apology Necessary, Arsenal v. Everton, 24.2.88; Welcome to England, England v. Holland, March 1988; and Gus Caesar, Arsenal v. Luton (at Wembley), 24.4.88 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby hurts his ankle and realizes he needs to be at an Arsenal game in a few hours. He ends up going, leaning on friends and standing in the rain so he has something to lean on during the game. (The Match, Coventry v. Arsenal, 13.12.87) Nick and Pete go to a Arsenal game, even though it's live on television. Nick still goes to home games but watches away games on television. (No Apology Necessary, Arsenal v. Everton, 24.2.88) Nick is apologetic for his love of football, but there are moments that make him think there is no other worthwhile leisurely pursuit. He loves the feeling of being in the right place at the right time. (Welcome to England, England v. Holland, March 1988) Nick gets a job with a trading company. He goes to Wembley to watch the English national team. While walking to the stadium, the crowd is pushed back by police. Nick and his work friends are forced to stand in the crowd for a while before giving up and going home. (Gus Caesar, Arsenal v. Luton (at Wembley), 24.4.88) Arsenal loses the Littlewoods Cup Final in 1988, and the fans blame a player named Augustus Caesar. He is so widely regarded as a bad player that no fans ever come to his defense. Nick is working to become a published writer and knows he committed himself to the life he picked and must work to succeed. He knows Caesar also committed himself to the life he leads.

Analysis: Nick continues to demonstrate his addiction to Arsenal. He hurts his ankle and cannot walk but does not let that stop him from seeing the game. However, he realizes he is irrational about this since he is perfectly fine watching away games on television



but can't bear to miss a home game. He seems to be able to get a better handle on his obsession and is becoming more grown-up about it. Nick also continues to show how crowd control methods were ineffective in the 1980s, when he almost was caught in another crush in 1988. This foreshadows that the worst is still to come in terms of football tragedies. In the meantime, Nick feels a kinship to a player named Augustus Caesar, who is regarded as the worst player on the team. His career makes Nick think of the openness of sports, since one's talent is evident for all to see. Nick thinks that unlike bad writers and musicians, bad players cannot get lucky and succeed if they don't have talent.



**Walking Distance, Arsenal v. Sheffield Wednesday, 21.1.89; Tyranny, Arsenal v. Charlton, 21.3.89; Hillsborough, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 15.4.89; The Greatest Moment Ever, Liverpool v. Arsenal, 26.5.89; and Seats, Arsenal v. Coventry, 22.8.89**

**Walking Distance, Arsenal v. Sheffield Wednesday, 21.1.89; Tyranny, Arsenal v. Charlton, 21.3.89; Hillsborough, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 15.4.89; The Greatest Moment Ever, Liverpool v. Arsenal, 26.5.89; and Seats, Arsenal v. Coventry, 22.8.89 Summary and Analysis**

Nick Hornby moves to north London, within walking distance to the Arsenal stadium. He goes to his first home game Saturday, feeling as though his personal history is tied into the neighborhood. However, he soon realizes the move doesn't change anything, since no one near the stadium is an Arsenal fan. (Tyranny, Arsenal v. Charlton, 21.3.89) Nick is now an adult and cannot use youth to explain away his obsession. His family can't plan any important events without consulting him about the football schedule. He misses a close friend's birthday party to go to a game. He finds it interesting that he can't skip a home game but is okay missing away games. (Hillsborough, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 15.4.89) Ninety-five Liverpool fans die after a tragedy at Hillsborough in 1989. The stadium was old and the crowd was over capacity, and the police lost control. Football stadiums eventually become all-seaters to prevent people from being crushed. Nick realizes there is a sentimental attachment to original stadiums but sees that the clubs need to put fans' safety first. (The Greatest Moment Ever, Liverpool v. Arsenal, 26.5.89) Arsenal beats Liverpool in the First Division Championship and Nick is ecstatic. He cannot find any other great moment in people's lives to compare it to, so it stands alone as the greatest moment. (Seats, Arsenal v. Coventry, 22.8.89) Nick finally buys a season ticket for the seated section.

Analysis: Nick moves closer to the Arsenal stadium, achieving the dream he's had since childhood. However, he learns that since the stadium is in London, the people around it are more transient and do not seem interested in the team. He does appreciate the



short walk to games, however, even though it is not much different living there than in the suburbs. This shatters the image of a posh Londoner that Nick tried to emulate when he was younger. Nick's friends and family must work around his obsession, especially when planning parties and other events. Nick realizes he hurts his friends but is unapologetic because his first and foremost trait is that he is an Arsenal fan. The tragedy that Nick has been foreshadowing occurs when almost 100 people die in a crowd crush. When stadiums begin to become all-seaters, Nick is not as nostalgic as some people because he understands things need to change to make the game better and safer for everyone. When Nick buys the season ticket for the seated area, he sees it as a sign of growing up and giving him stronger rights to the team.



**Smoking, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 25.10.89; Seven Goals and a Punch-Up, Arsenal v. Norwich, 4.11.89; Saddam Hussein and Warren Barton, Arsenal v. Everton, 19.1.91; Typical Arsenal, Arsenal v. Manchester United, 6.5.91; Playing, Friends v. Other Friends, ever**

**Smoking, Arsenal v. Liverpool, 25.10.89; Seven Goals and a Punch-Up, Arsenal v. Norwich, 4.11.89; Saddam Hussein and Warren Barton, Arsenal v. Everton, 19.1.91; Typical Arsenal, Arsenal v. Manchester United, 6.5.91; Playing, Friends v. Other Friends, every Wednesday night; and A Sixties Revival, Arsenal v. Aston Villa, 11.1.92 Summary and Analysis**

A late 1989 game against Liverpool is the first time Nick Hornby sits through a game without any nicotine in his bloodstream. He has tried to quit before but can't because of the looming pressures of difficult work, fights with his girlfriend, and Arsenal. (Seven Goals and a Punch-Up, Arsenal v. Norwich, 4.11.89) Nick thinks that for a match to be thrilling, it needs to have the following: goals; bad referee decisions because indignation is a crucial part of the experience; rain; the opposition missing a penalty; a member of the opposition receiving a red card and getting kicked off, and some kind of incident, be in nonsensical or disgraceful, such as a fight. (Saddam Hussein and Warren Barton, Arsenal v. Everton, 19.1.91) Football fans knew before anyone else that the Gulf War had started, since it was first broadcast just before midnight while fans were waiting to see game highlights. (Typical Arsenal, Arsenal v. Manchester United, 6.5.91) Arsenal wins the League division cup again. Sometimes Nick wishes Arsenal was more elegant and wonders how his psyche is affected by always supporting the underdog. (Playing, Friends v. Other Friends, every Wednesday night) Nick begins to play football with friends on a regular basis, which makes him feel closer to the professional players. (A Sixties Revival, Arsenal v. Aston Villa, 11.1.92) Nick says there is a part of him that is afraid to write about his obsession with Arsenal, but he finds himself embracing the misery football causes. As he goes to Arsenal games now, he feels like he has come full circle.



Analysis: Nick is continually trying to improve himself, even sitting through a whole game without the benefit of nicotine. This shows remarkable restraint for Nick as he has shown through his memoir how stressful games can be. He still has his requirements for a good game; however, they are much more lenient than his list when he was child, indicating that he is more likely now to be happy after a game. Nick has exhibited growth as a person and as a football fan in his journey to adulthood. He begins to find football fun like he never has before, even starting to play it casually with a group of friends. He even enjoys the misery that being a football fan causes, showing that he now has the ability to put things into perspective. Nick has learned how not to take himself so seriously and therefore begins a new chapter in his life, one where he has come to terms with his obsession with Arsenal.





# Characters

## Nick Hornby

Nick Hornby is an English writer and the author of *Fever Pitch*, a nonfiction memoir about his obsession with the English football team, Arsenal. He has been a fan of the team since he was a young boy and his father, who was divorced from his mother, took him to a game. He first saw the team play in 1965 and was immediately intrigued by the culture of football and those who are fanatical about it. Nick finds he can bond with his father and his friends at school through football, and his interest quickly becomes an obsession. He is intimately familiar with the team and its players, and his moods throughout his life coincide with the team's fortunes. His obsession with Arsenal intensifies as he gets older, especially during his teen years and his twenties. As a teen, he attends many home and away games and becomes an expert on football and its fans, especially those known as hooligans who fight and curse at the opposing fans. Through his twenties, Nick struggles to discover what he wants to do with his life and falls into a depression until Arsenal beats Tottenham in the Littlewoods Cup semifinals in 1987. Football takes precedence above all else for Nick, and it is only when he becomes a full adult that he is able to balance his obsession with his regular life.

## Mr. Hornby

Mr. Hornby is Nick's father, as well as Gil's, but his first name is never mentioned. He leaves Nick's mother, Mrs. Hornby, when Nick is only a child to marry another woman. He has a second son, Jonathan, by his second wife. In an effort to get closer to his children, he makes frequent trips to take Nick and Gil out on weekly excursions. One day, running out of things to do, he takes Nick to a football game and kick starts Nick's obsession with Arsenal. Mr. Hornby eventually becomes closer to Nick as they attend games together all the time. He eventually moves to France with his new family, but Nick comes and spends time with them there, and Mr. Hornby even comes back several times to go to games with Nick. Mr. Hornby is a loving, if a bit distant, father and truly seems to want to spend time with his son. Nick loves his father but does resent his leaving and gets back in small ways, such as supporting Arsenal, a team his father doesn't like and always staying to the end of games, even if it's cold and his father doesn't have a coat. Nevertheless, football is the vehicle which allows Nick and his father to bond.

## Mrs. Hornby

Mrs. Hornby is Nick's mother, but her first name is never mentioned. She is left to raise Nick and her daughter, Gil, when their father, Mr. Hornby, leaves to marry another woman. She is understanding of Nick's obsession with football and even buys him



tickets and gives him rides to games when he is young. She allows Nick to be the man of the house when he comes home from games, and Nick clearly loves her.

## **Gil Hornby**

Gil Hornby is Nick's sister. She lives with Nick and their mother in the Home Counties after Mr. Hornsby leaves the family. She tolerates Nick's obsession with football and is quick to alert him to news about the team when she is grown and has a job with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

## **Arsenal**

Arsenal is a Premier League English football team whose home field is called Highbury. Nick Hornby goes to one of their games with his father and quickly becomes obsessed with the team.

## **Jonathan Hornby**

Jonathan Hornby is Nick Hornby's half-brother who also supports Arsenal and attends several games with Nick.

## **Nick's Girlfriend**

Nick's girlfriend, or partner, is a woman he meets in the late 80s and they stay together through the novel. She is never mentioned by name.

## **Pete**

Pete is a friend of Nick Hornby who is as fanatical about Arsenal as Nick is. His friendship keeps Nick supporting Arsenal, even at times when Nick may have drifted away from the team.

## **Hislam**

Hislam is a football fan who lives near Nick Hornsby and attends some games with him. Hislam brags about being in nonexistent fights and tries to be a hooligan.

## **Rat**

Rat is the older brother of one of Nick Hornsby's classmates. He attends games with Nick after Nick's father moves away.



## Neil Kaas

Neil Kaas is a fan of Luton, an English football team. He takes Nick to a Luton v. Arsenal game.

## Charlie George

Charlie George is an English football player who played for Arsenal. He makes obscene gestures at the opposing fans during a game against Derby in 1972, and Nick Hornsby later has to run from the angry fans.

## Bob McNab

Bob McNab is an English football player who played for Arsenal. Nick Hornsby meets him before a game and speaks to him briefly.

## Charlie Nicholas

Charlie Nicholas is an English football player who played for Arsenal. His successes and failures on the field parallel successes and failures in Nick Hornsby's life.

## Quentin Crisp

Quentin Crisp is an Arsenal fan that Nick encounters at games. He wears a helmet and walks around the stadium incessantly during the game.

## Augustus Caesar

Augustus Caesar is an English football player who plays for Arsenal. The fans blame him for losing the Littlewoods Cup in 1988.

## Liam Brady

Liam Brady is an English football player who plays for Arsenal. Nick Hornsby has an fixation on him during the early eighties, and Brady leaves Arsenal just before Nick breaks up with his serious girlfriend, leading Nick to miss both of them more.

## The Munsters

The Munsters is the nickname of a family of Arsenal fans who act as stewards to the crowd.



## Harry Taylor

Harry Taylor is an Arsenal fan who does not stay to the end of games on Tuesday because that is his bath night.

## George Graham

George Graham is one of Arsenal's coaches and a former Arsenal player.

## Hooligans

Hooligans are football fans who are known to get rough while watching the game. They stereotypically drink heavily and start fights with other fans.

## Liverpool

Liverpool is an English football team.

## Juventus

Juventus is an Italian football team. They are set to play Liverpool when several people are crushed to death in a crowd rush before the game.

## West Brom

West Brom is an English football team.

## Everton

Everton is an English football team.

## Manchester United

Manchester United is an English football team.

## Reading

Reading is an English football team. Their stadium is closest to Nick Hornsby's home, but Nick would never consider supporting them.



## **Derby**

Derby is an English football team.

## **West Ham**

West Ham in an English football team.

## **Luton**

Luton is an English football team.



# Objects/Places

## Football

Football is a sport where two teams of players try to score by putting the ball in the other team's goal without using their hands. It is called soccer in America.

## Highbury

Highbury is Arsenal's home football field in London.

## The Home Counties

The Home Counties are a suburb of London, England, where Nick Hornby lived as a child with his mom and sister.

## Wembley

Wembley is the main football stadium in England, where national team games and cup finals are frequently played.

## The West Stand

The West Stand is a section of the stadium at Highbury. The tickets for this section are more expensive and more affluent, middle-class people tend to sit there. Nick Hornby sits in this section when he goes to games with his dad.

## Schoolboy's Enclosure

Schoolboy's Enclosure is a section of the stadium at Highbury. The tickets for this section are cheap, and those who are in it must stand throughout the game.

## Clock End

Clock End is a section of the stadium at Highbury where opposing fans sit.

## FA Cup

The FA Cup, or Football Association Challenge Cup, is an English football cup competition.



## **The League Cup**

The League Cup is a English football association cup competition. Only teams in the Premier League and the football league can compete for this cup.

## **Cambridge University**

Cambridge University is the college Nick Hornby attends.

## **Heysel, Belgium**

Heysel, Belgium, is where several Italian football fans are crushed when a wall collapses. The fans had been fleeing from English fans.

## **Hillsborough**

Hillsborough is a stadium in England. Ninety-five Liverpool fans are crushed to death there in the late-80s when the crowd gets out of control.



# Themes

## Obsession

Once Nick Hornby becomes interested in football, it quickly becomes an all-consuming obsession and intensifies as he gets older. Nick attends games faithfully and always follows news of the team, even between seasons. His obsession with football helps him fit in at school as a child and allows him to bond with other boys his age. Football also allows him to spend time with a father who is absent most of the time. Even when he attends games alone, Nick seems to find a sort of family in the other fans, especially since his own extended family is sparse. Football becomes the one constant in his life, something he can always turn to no matter how the rest of his life is going. Watching football matches also allows him to get out his angst and aggression, something he does not feel he can do in his daily life. It allows him to take part in a masculine activity, which also may compensate for the lack of a steady father figure in his life. However, obsession can become unhealthy, as Nick himself points out several times. Overall, however, Nick seems to have found a healthy balance by incorporating football into his life, but not allowing it to take over.

## Male Bonding

Becoming a fan of Arsenal allows Nick Hornby to get closer to many of the men in his life. He initially goes to games to spend quality time with his father, who Nick resents for leaving his mother. They continue to go to games, which allows Nick to salvage some of his relationship with his father. It even allows him to get back at his father, such as by staying for the whole game when it's cold out and his dad doesn't have a coat. Football also allows Nick to make friends at school, as he and his classmates bond over their love of the game and collecting soccer stickers. Nick fits in with his classmates because they share this interest. As he grows, Nick finds that football allows him to bond with his co-workers and adult friends. Sharing a common interest allows Nick to form lasting relationships with men and gives them something to talk about and dissect. When Nick also begins taking his half-brother, Jonathan, to games, it shows that he is willing to share that part of himself with a child he could easily ignore since the boy was born because of his father deserting his first family. However, Nick allows football to bring them together, as he does with other men throughout his life. For men who have a hard time talking about their feelings, football is a way for them to spend time together and talk, without revealing themselves as emotionally weak.

## Despair

Nick Hornby says in his memoir that the natural state of the football fan is despair. Serious football fans always expect that their team is going to lose the game, and Arsenal fans are no different. From the first game he attends, Nick notices that all the





men around him seem angry and personally hurt by the team. After his own obsession picks up, Nick has a sick, queasy feeling in his stomach throughout each game, not being able to relax unless Arsenal is several goals ahead. By keeping their expectations low, if the team does lose, it will not affect the fans as badly, at least in theory. However, this attitude eventually takes a toll on Nick as he falls further into depression in his twenties. He becomes disillusioned with the negative attitudes of the football fans and how they act, especially when the fans make derogatory and sometimes racist comments to the players. Growing up as a person and a small victory for Arsenal is the only thing that pulls him out of the depression. While he is still sensitive to Arsenal's fortunes, by the end of the memoir, he is better equipped to put football in perspective and understand how there are other things in life that are, if not more, at least as equally important.



# Style

## Perspective

The memoir *Fever Pitch* is told from the first person point of view, a common device in memoir narratives. Nick Hornby is describing events that have actually taken place and happened to him as he followed the Arsenal football team throughout the years. Nick grows up in a middle-class family in a suburb of London, England, and enters the world of football in the late 60's. He is introduced to football by his father, and it becomes an obsession that continues to the present day. Football, for Nick, is a way to cope with life for Nick and countless others, and he examines this phenomenon throughout the novel. Nick is rather open about his opinions and is not afraid to discuss times when he has been embarrassed or afraid. He looks back on his experiences as he is writing in 1991 and 1992, and is able to discuss his actions and reactions in hindsight and with a more objective voice. His views and theories allow us to look at our own obsessions and how we use them to find meaning or solace in our lives. His reflections on people and their obsessions are sharp, witty, and worthwhile, and he takes the time to explain his positions clearly. Overall, Nick offers a clear and educated perspective on the world of English football and the obsessive nature of its hardcore fans.

## Tone

Throughout the memoir, *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby speaks as a true football expert. Nick often mentions terms, places, and people related to football with the understanding that the audience for his book will be familiar with the world of English football. The casual reader may have a hard time following the novel if they do not have a basic understanding of the sport and its history in England. For example, the football league in England has several divisions, the highest of which is the Premier League, in which Arsenal plays. Nick takes it for granted that the reader will understand where teams fall in the league and in which division they play. He also takes for granted that the reader is familiar with London and its surrounding areas, although a complete understanding of the geography is not necessary. Nick also has a well-rounded vocabulary, which he is not hesitant to use throughout the text; however, his language is not incomprehensible; his observations are usually easy to follow, and it is not hard to discern a word's meaning. While he does use some profanity, the ultimate tone is one of an upper-middle class, educated man who is well versed in the subject matter.

## Structure

In his memoir *Fever Pitch*, Nick Hornby writes in relation to games he has seen throughout his life, and this allows him to bring together ideas in a more free-form style while also following the games chronologically. He breaks up the chapters by important games he has gone to throughout his life and uses them as jumping-off points to



describe an aspect of the game or an event in which he has participated. He names the two teams that have played that day, and for important games, the stadium where it takes place. This technique, instead of a simple numbering of chapters, drives home that Nick's obsession is great and an integral part of his life, so much so that he remembers important life events in relation to games he has attended. Football has always been there for him, so it is only fitting he uses the games he's attended to act as chapter headings. The memoir is also broken up into larger sections documenting several year periods of Hornby's obsession, including 1968 to 1975, 1976 to 1986, and 1986 to 1992. This sectioning of the memoir reflects the different stages of Nick's life as he transitions from a boy to a young man and finally to an adult. It also represents how football has been the backbone of his life throughout his growing years and will still be part of his life for years to come.



## Quotes

"It's in there all the time, looking for a way out." Introduction, Sunday, 14th July, 1991, pg. 1.

"But then, obsessives have to lie on occasions like this. If we told the truth every time, then we would be unable to maintain relationships with anyone from the real world." Introduction, Sunday, 14th July 1991, pg. 2.

"I fell in love with football as I was later to fall in love with women: suddenly, inexplicably, uncritically, giving no thought to the pain or disruption it would bring with it." Home Debut, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 14.9.68, pg. 7.

"... the natural state of the football fan is bitter disappointment, no matter what the score." Home Debut, Arsenal v. Stoke City, 14.9.68, pg. 12.

"And yes, I am aware of the downside of this wonderful facility that men have: they become repressed, they fail in their relationships with women, their conversation is trivial and boorish, they find themselves unable to express their emotional needs, they cannot relate to their children, and they die lonely and miserable. But, you know, what the hell?" A Spare Jimmy Husband, Arsenal v. West Ham, 26.10.68.

"Marriages are nowhere near as rigid - you won't catch any Arsenal fans slipping off to Tottenham for a bit of extra-marital slap and tickle, and though divorce is a possibility (you can just stop going if things get too bad), getting hitched is out of the question." Boring, Boring Arsenal, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 27.12.69, pg. 27.

"But the plain truth is that the club means more to us than it does to them. Where were they twenty years ago? Where will they be in twenty years' time? Where will they be in two years time, a couple of them? (At Villa Park or Old Trafford, bearing down on the Arsenal goal with the ball at their feet, that's where.)" Me and Bob McNab, Stoke City v. Arsenal, (Villa Park), 5.4.72

"In any case, when I arrived at college, it became clear that I was not alone: there were scores of us, boys from Nottingham and Newcastle and Essex, many of whom had been educated through the state system and welcomed by a college anxious to modulate its elitist image; and we all played football, and supported football teams, and within days we had all found each other, and it was like starting at grammar school all over again, except without the Soccer Star stickers." A Fourth Division Town, Cambridge United v. Darlington, 29.1.77, pg. 89.

"Before each home game we all of us trooped into the sweet shop, purchased our mice, walked outside, bit the head off as though we were removing the pin from a grenade, and tossed the torsos under the wheels of oncoming cars; Jack Reynolds would stand in the doorway watching us, shaking his head sorrowfully. United, thus protected,



remained unbeaten at the Abbey for months." Sugar Mice and Buzzcocks Albums, Cambridge United v. Orient, 4.11.78, pg. 102.

"Of course, intelligence in a footballer is no bad thing, particularly in a midfield player, a playmaker, although this intelligence is not the same intelligence as that required to enjoy, say, a 'difficult' European novel." Liam Brady, Arsenal v. Nottingham Forest, 5.5.80, pg. 113.

"Everyone knows the song that Millwall fans sing, to the tune of 'Sailing': 'No one likes us/No one likes us/No one likes us/We don't care.' In fact I have always felt that the song is a little melodramatic, and that if anyone should sing it, it is Arsenal." Arsenalesque, West Ham v. Arsenal, 10.5.80, pg. 116.

"There must be many fathers around the country who have experienced the cruelest, most crushing rejection of all: their children have ended up supporting the wrong team." My Brother, Arsenal v. Tottenham, 30.8.80, pg. 122.

"Here's a funny thing though: Jonathan and I sit there, at Highbury, week after week, partly because of the distressing circumstances that led to his existence. My father left my mother in order to set up home with his mother, and my half-brother was born, and somehow all this turned me into an Arsenal fan; how odd, then, that my particular kink should have been transferred to him, like a genetic flaw." My Brother, Arsenal v. Tottenham, 30.8.80, pg. 124.

"Typically, I remember her first game and she doesn't: a moment ago I poked my head round the bedroom door and asked her the name of the opponents, score and scorers, but all she could tell me was that Arsenal won and Niall Quinn got one. (2-0, and the other goal came courtesy of a Charlton defender." A Male Fantasy, Arsenal v. Charlton Athletic, 18.11.86, pg. 163.

"She is much too gentle a person to attempt to out-tantrum me, so she chose the latter course, and I can safely and smugly say that I am top Arsenal dog in this house, and that when and if we have children it will be my bottom exclusively that fills our season ticket seat. I'm ashamed, of course I'm ashamed, that I have had to play dirty like this, but for a while back then I was beginning to worry." A Male Fantasy, Arsenal v. Charlton Athletic, 18.11.86, pg. 166.

"Though I am still one of Arsenal's most devoted fans, and though I still go to every home game, and feel the same tensions and elations and glooms that I have always felt, I now understand them to have an entirely separate identity whose success and failure has no relationship with my own. That night, I stopped being an Arsenal lunatic and relearnt how to be a fan, still cranky, and still dangerously obsessive, but only a fan nonetheless." From NW3 to N17, Tottenham v. Arsenal, 4.3.87, pg. 178.

"But I was waiting for the following Saturday, my first ever home home game against Sheffield Wednesday, when finally, at the age of thirty-one, I would walk down Avenell Road, through the turnstiles and on to the North Bank as a north Londoner." Walking Distance, Arsenal v. Sheffield Wednesday, 21.1.89, pg. 203.



"I'm writing about me, now. The boy who fretted his way through the first part of the book has gone; the young man who spent most of his twenties twisted in on himself isn't around either. I can no longer use age, or rather youth, to explain myself the way I have been able to do elsewhere." Tyranny, Arsenal v. Charlton, 21.3.89, pg. 205.

"Over the years we have come to confuse football with something else, something more necessary, which is why these cries of outrage are so heartfelt and indignant. We view everything from the top of this mountain of partisan passion; it is no wonder that all our perspectives are wrong. Perhaps it was time to climb down, and see what everyone else in the outside world sees." Hillsborough, Arsenal v. Newcastle, 15.4.89, pg. 215.

"So please, be tolerant of those who describe a sporting moment as their best ever. We do not lack imagination, not have we had sad and barren lives; it is just that real life is paler, duller, and contains less potential for unexpected delirium." The Greatest Moment Ever, Liverpool v. Arsenal, 26.5.89, pg. 223.



## Topics for Discussion

Nick Hornby initially refuses to go to a football game with his father, but once he does it becomes a routine. How does football help or hinder Nick's relationship with his father? Does his father seem to take Nick to games out of obligation or out of love for his son? Why or why not? Does going to the games help Nick become a man? Why or why not? Cite examples.

How does Nick's obsession with football affect the other members of his family, his sister and mother? How does going to football games allow him to play a patriarchal role? Does his obsession affect his romantic relationships? Why or why not?

Nick Hornby says the natural state of the football fan is "bitter disappointment." How is this evidenced by his feelings throughout the novel? Why is football so emotionally upsetting, and why do fans continue to subject themselves to it? Could this sentiment be applied to fans of other sports? Why or why not?

Nick Hornby writes that loyalty to one team is rigid, and a serious fan cannot choose to support another team. What is the rationale behind this? Why is loyalty to a team so important, especially as the players on the team change every year? Why would fans not choose to support certain players instead of a team as a whole?

Throughout his formative years, Nick Hornby portrays football as uncouth and unpopular, and women especially seem to look down upon football fans. Why is this the case? What aspects of football-watching would not appeal to most women? Does the team aspect of football appeal more to men than women? Why or why not? How does the general public's opinion of football change in later years?

Nick Hornby takes his half-brother, Jonathan, to an Arsenal game, and Jonathan becomes an Arsenal fan. How is this ironic? How does Nick becoming an Arsenal fan, and then Jonathan becoming one, parallel each other? How does this help the two families bond?

How is Nick Hornby affected by the tragedies at Heysel in Belgium and at Hillsborough stadium in England? Do they affect his love of or outlook on the game? Why or why not? How does he feel about the regulations imposed on the football clubs after the tragedies?

At the end of the novel, does Nick come to terms with his football obsession? Why or why not? How does he grow as a person and change from the young child who was so entranced with football? Does his football experience come full circle by the end? Why or why not?