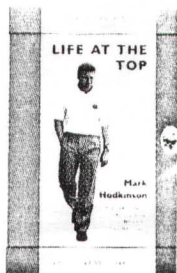


LIFE AT THE TOP

Mark Hodgkinson ■ Queen Anne Press ■ £7.99

'It was end-to-end stuff, with little regard for minor irritants such as



defending or playing to position.' Based

on an excellent weekly column in *The Times*, the author traces Barnsley's innocent steps into the

unknown. He cleverly

portrays the initial euphoria of club and fans, their desperate hopes and dreams during the season, then the harsh reality of relegation. If you think this sounds a tad schmaltzy, forget it. Far from indulging in sentimentality, the account is clinically ruthless, depicting the battle to survive at the top as little more than bravado. You can taste the futility.

inevitably, there is some repetition – Barnsley lost, Barnsley lost, Barnsley lost. But the insights into the club itself are intriguing, and it's a shame that this aspect is not explored in greater depth. However, it appears that the friendly, little minnow is just as wary of journalists as any plc FC.

The account also offers some nice titbits, such as the impact Barnsley's promotion had on amateur football in the area. Apparently the number of teams shrank from 40 to 23, the former players opting instead to watch the Premiership stars when

they visited Oakwell. The book is pleasant to read, although more of the author's quirky humour would have been welcome.

Verdict: *Built on true Yorkshire grit.*

★ ★ ★ ★

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