

# MOTTY'S HANGING UP HIS MIC AFTER 10 WORLD CUPS AND 29 FA CUP FINALS

# 'This is the time to go... I've had a good run'



**YOUTHFUL:** Motty's first radio commentary was an Everton v Derby game in December 1969

### COME Sunday, is Motty going to blub?

He's telling me no - seems adamant, in fact - but it's not as though we'd blame him if he did.

For one thing, he'll be doing his very last BBC football commentary that afternoon - Crystal Palace v West Brom - before laying down his mic after half a century.

For another, he'll then be whizzed off on the final whistle to London's Royal Festival Hall to pick up his Bafta.

Yes, really. They're giving football's John Motson a Bafta - the Special Award, no less - like he's Joanna Lumley or something. It's for his outstanding contribution to sports broadcasting. How brilliant is that?

"It is such an honour," he agrees. But no tears after that final match, John? Really?

"No, I don't think I'll burst into tears," he assures me. "I'll just treat it, as much as I can, like any other game, and obviously everything will sink in afterwards."

### Weird

"I don't see it being a hugely emotional occasion."

Fair enough. But having been immersed in football for so long (10 World Cups, 10 Euros, 29 FA Cup Finals, 200-plus England internationals) and, in the process, becoming, if I may say so, a sheepskin-coated cult hero - won't it feel weird to just, er, stop?

"Well, I'm only retiring from the BBC, Mike," says John, who'll be 73 in July. "It's not that I'll never do anything in my life again."

"I'm not particularly sad because, BBC-wise, 50 years isn't a bad innings. Everyone has their time, and the commentary job is now very, very overcrowded with lots of people wanting to do it."

"I've had a very good stint, and I think probably this is the moment, certainly to step down from Match Of The Day. I have to say I'm quite relaxed about it."

Relaxed, I wonder - or even a wee bit relieved? Motty clearly still loves the game, but the more we chat, the more I wonder if there are aspects of it he's grown a tad weary of.

Does he think, for example, that football's lost its soul?

"Yes, maybe a little bit," he concedes. "The working-class hero, who'd go to the ground on the bus with the supporters, is a long-forgotten feature of our game. Players now have such an enormous amount of money, get treated so royally. It's definitely changed in that way."

"It's harder now for fans to identify with them because they're very rarely got to meet them."

"So there's a big divide - probably too big in many ways."

Nor do I sense he's entirely keen on some of the techno-



**Favourite comedian**



**OVER AND OUT:** The special Motty night on May 19 includes a quiz, classic clips and a full video and live text re-run of the 2006 FA Cup final, which he commented on



**Favourite pet**



## John Motson Legend

### THE MIKE WARD INTERVIEW



**Virgin TV British Academy Television Awards are on Sunday at 8pm on BBC One**

gy muscling its way in. I mention VAR, for instance - the Video Assistant Referee thing that's sorted out key decisions in recent cup games. Turns out it sends Motty mad. "It's a load of rubbish," he declares. "Goal-line technology is terrific, but to have the referee running across the pitch with his finger in his ear, having to watch a video - it completely disregards his status."

"He's no longer in charge of his own decisions. That's a great mistake."

Soon, of course, Motty won't need

to worry so much about stuff like this. He can go and watch a game just for the fun of it. Freed from his BBC shackles, will he now stand there and sing, I ask?

My question seems to throw him a little. That, or it convinces him I'm a moron.

"Sing?" he replies, with what sounds like a blend of bafflement and horror. "Why would I SING?"

Okey-dokey. Moving swiftly on. Your most memorable moment?

"I get asked this an awful lot," he replies. "It does get a bit tedious.

I'm not going to pick out one. There are 20 that'll feature in BBC Two's Motty Night on May 19. I'm keeping my powder dry for that."

Tedious, I sense, are questions about his legendary sheepskin coats. But come on, I have to ask.

"The sheepskin coat thing came about by accident. Someone took a photo of me at Wycombe in the snow. It was never supposed to be part of my, whatever you want to call it, 'image'."

"Other people seized on that and made it into something it probably

isn't. I don't mind, it's quite affectionate, but no, I didn't set out to make that some sort of trademark."

No plans then, I guess, for a museum of Motty sheepskins. "I've only got one left," he assures me. "I'm auctioning that for charity."

So would Motty have loved to have been a footballer himself? He did, after all, help form a Sunday side, the Roving Reporters, in the mid-60s. He played left-sided midfield. Dreaming of the big time, perhaps?

"No," he insists. "I was better at table tennis."

## MOTTY'S FAVOURITES

- TV SHOW - Match Of The Day / The Americans
- FILM - Scent Of A Woman
- COMEDIAN - Peter Kay
- SPORTS STAR - Cristiano Ronaldo
- ACTOR - Al Pacino or Jack Nicholson
- SONG - American Pie
- APP - BBC Sport
- FOOD - Roast beef
- DRINK - The Famous Grouse whisky
- HOLIDAY DESTINATION - Guernsey
- CITY - Vienna
- ANIMAL - Hamster (pet) / Elephant (wild)