Who do English football commentators think they are?

‘It was a terrible clearance by the Japanese defender, lazy and casual’ (Sam Mataface, ITV, on Southampton vs Hapoel Beer-Sheba, 29/9/16)

‘What is ….trying there?’ (Guy Mowbray, BBC on West Ham vs Southampton, 25/9/16)

‘Hits Porto where it hurts…punishes Porto’ (David Stowell, ITV, on Leicester City vs Porto, 28/9/16)

‘Dispossessed by ..punish the error’ Clive Tyldesley, ITV on Celtic vs Manchester City, 28/9/16
I’ve had a feeling for some time that, despite no actual ability to play the game themselves, English football commentators can be cruel, judgemental know-it-all’s and that their Scottish equivalents are not. Sam Mataface’s comment above was the trigger for me to have a more scientific look at the performance of him and three other English commentators with a view to comparing them to a group of Scottish commentators. First, here’s a little context.

You know this theory that we Scots are altogether more likeable people than our English neighbours, especially the Southern ones? I know, it’s just stupid. There are nice folk in East Anglia and nasty folk in East Renfrewshire. Indeed, wasn’t Jim Murphy the MP for East Renfrewshire?

But, there is actually some hard evidence that, on the whole, ‘we’ are often nicer folk. Look at the recent spike in hate crime in England post Brexit and the lack of such in Scotland. See this in the Scotsman but from the London-based Mirror newspaper:

‘A Freedom of Information (FOI) request submitted by the Mirror revealed that, although tensions had boiled over in a number of places south of the Border - particularly in areas that had voted to leave the EU - Scotland was the only police force area in the UK where the number of recorded hate crimes fell.’

What about the vote for the Nasty Party (Tories), with their fondness for offshore accounts, hunting and shooting and hurting the poor and the disabled? In 2015, the Scottish Conservatives got 14.9% of the vote in Scotland. Across the UK, the Conservatives got 36.7% of the vote. If you are English, you are nearly three times as likely to be a Tory, than you would be if you were a Scot. Sorry, excuse me. I can’t type for that lump in my throat.

Then there are our national football supporters, the wonderful Tartan Army. I don’t really need to point out just how awful their English equivalents can be.

I’m sure there is more evidence but, as a Scot I don’t want to hurt their feelings any more than is necessary.

While we are, just were, on the topic of football, is it possible that our TV commentators are nicer too?
I watched *Match of the Day 2* (25/9/16), *Sportscene* (25/9/16) and *UEFA Champions League Highlights* (29/9/16) and made a note of comments of a particular kind:

1. Knowing better than a highly skilled athlete just what to do
2. Knowing what players are actually thinking
3. Using cruel, personally insulting language
4. Seeing incompetence or weakness in errors which might have been almost unavoidable for any human being
5. Blaming individuals rather than the team

Here are Sam Mataface’s comments of the above kind from three short highlights pieces:

‘How on earth did he not...that’s a poor clearance...a terrible clearance.....almost made to pay...got away with another...missed a golden chance...has spurned it....he’d have been better served if he’d...wasn’t convincing....there were other options....a real pasting...was napping....took it too heavily...went too wide....more by luck than judgement...wasn’t convincing...his first ball is inaccurate...it was a terrible clearance by the Japanese defender, lazy and casual’

How on earth does a, by comparison, slow, unfit, unskilled ordinary human being feel able to judge today’s super-fit, highly trained elite footballing athletes, in this way? I’d like to see him try to get past any premier league defender or try to tackle any premier league forward today.

Here are some from Guy Mowbray

‘What is (named player) trying there?...look a sorry bunch now...they just crumbled...exploited weakness...should have pulled it across...he just totally switched off...they were all over the place...they couldn’t cope.

How on earth....

And from David Stowell:

‘rather fortunate...let off...hits Porto where it hurts....punished Porto....had to shovel it away...an easy safe’
How on earth...

Finally from Clive Tyldesley:

‘Punish the error...dispossessed by...scuffed his finish...allowed to turn...has presented it to’

I’m sure you get the idea. These guys talk as if they are somehow godlike, above these awesome specimens. They are of course on higher level, up in media boxes, with the benefit of an aerial view utterly denied to the mere mortals on the pitch. Of course they see the other options from up there. Even I would! Why, though, are they so superior, so brutal with such talk of punishing, hurting, exploiting and being made to pay? Why are they so ready to talk smugly of crumbling, not coping, being all over the place, switching off and not coping when they cannot possibly, for all their elevated situations, see into the minds of these superb athletes pushed to their limits, hyper-alert and fighting for survival in a cauldron of emotion?

Let’s look now at BBC Scotland’s ‘Sportscene’ highlights of the games on 25th September 2016, with six different Scottish commentators. From six highlight pieces, here are the phrases you might see as similarly cruel, judgemental and all-knowing:

‘He’s loose with the back pass...he’s not really picked up there....an alarming amount of space....he will feel he should have hit the target with that’

There you go, there’s nothing much really. There were comments alluding to collective errors but mostly it was just that the other team played particularly well that resulted in success.

I know, I’m on thin ice here but haven’t I produced evidence of at least some observable differences. What do you think?