

A Few Incidents in Association Football

By WALTER ARNOTT

(The greatest full back Queen's Park, Glasgow, ever had)

Ofttimes in my quiet moments my mind, obviously acting by its own impulse, ruminates on football life as I have known it, and what joyous memories it brings to me. I have often been asked what was the most interesting experience I ever had in connection with our glorious winter pastime. But that is a question beyond me to answer, because these experiences have been so many, and so varied, that I could not single out one that was outstandingly more pre-eminent than any other.

To me, one of the most interesting episodes in connection with Association Football is the history of the Vale of Leven Football Club. The manner of that Club's initiation into the "dribbling game" reminds me of an Aberdeen story.

There was a tramp who had the reputation of being the most successful beggar on the road, and he was egotistical enough to swagger that he could go to any part of Scotland and not be refused alms. He happened on one occasion to talk thus bouncingly to an Aberdonian, and the man from Aberdeen said, "I'll bet you anything you like you can't beg in Aberdeen successfully." The tramp was so confident that he could make a success of begging in the Granite City that he took on a bet that he would. So he hied himself thither to the noted Northern City. He decided that he would not touch the small houses, but made straight away for the villas. At his first call the maid answered the door, and he asked to see the Mistress. The Mistress duly appeared at the door and the tramp said to her, "Will you give me twopence for my bed?" The Mistress looked at him and then said, "Will you bring it in till I see it first?"

Well, in the late sixties and very early seventies shinty was the predominant game in the Leven Valley, but the Queen's Park Club, in the early seventies, did a lot of missionary work with a view to the spread of Association Football in Scotland, and, in their peregrinations, they tapped at the door of the

shinty stalwarts in Alexandria district and asked them to give up shinty, and, in its stead, play Association Football. The answer of the Vale boys was, "Will you come and let us see it first?" and the Queen's Park at once acquiesced in the request, and went down to Alexandria and gave an exhibition of our wonderful game.

Such a favourable impression did that game make on these ardent youths that they there and then decided to form a Club of their own, and that Club was called the Vale of Leven Football Club.

These fellows in and around that Dumbartonshire town were gifted with all the youthful strength and symmetry which a lavish Nature could bestow on them, plus unbounded enthusiasm for outdoor sport, and they soon made a name for themselves in the world of Association Football. Distinction, in whatever department of activity, is mostly of slow growth. There is an ephemeral distinction which grows, blossoms, and dies in a very short time, but the distinction gained by these old Vale players, as the sequel shows, will live as long as football is played in these Islands of ours. I venture to say that these old Vale players were the most apt pupils the famous old Queen's Park Club ever had anything to do with.

In quite a short time—to be precise, 1876—the Vale Club were drawn against Queen's Park in the Scottish Cup Competition, and the tie drawn to be played on first Hampden Park (there have been three Hampden Parks). It was played on the last Saturday of December, 1876, and I was an eyewitness of the game. As long as I live I shall never forget the excitement during that game. Nothing like it had ever before been seen in football in Scotland. During the whole 90 minutes the ball travelled from end to end of the field with wonderful rapidity. The bold, vigorous charging on both sides was even a delight to watch. Sometimes I think if such charging were indulged in to-day the Referee and the two Goalkeepers would be the only ones left on the field of play.

The Vale players triumphed in the end by two goals to one, and so have the honour—an honour that can never be erased—of having inflicted the first defeat on the Queen's Park Club.

Having got over what they thought was an unsurmountable barrier to their ambition to win the Blue Ribbon of Scottish Football, they set about themselves, with that whole-souled spirit which deserves, and so often commands, success, to bring the Scottish Cup to the Leven Valley. They reached the Final, and met Rangers in that game on the West of Scotland's ground at Hamilton Crescent. It was a great game, with "Jack as good as his Master," and the game ended in a draw. The replay was again on the same ground, and once more it ended in a draw. The third meeting was at Hampden Park on the Friday night following, and here the game ended in favour of the stalwarts from the Vale by three goals to two.

There was a record crowd of 10,000 people at that third game, and the enthusiasm created by these cup-ties helped, more than anything else I know, to lay the solid foundation that football stands on to-day. These fellows from Alexandria have the proud distinction of being the first provincial club to win the Scottish Cup, and, having won it, they kept on winning it for the next two years. Of that 1876 Vale eleven no fewer than seven of them were chosen to play for Scotland against England, and several of them on more than one occasion.

While holders of the Scottish Cup they had a challenge issued to them by the holders of the English Cup, the London Wanderers. To show the grit that was in them, and that they feared no foe, the Vale boys accepted the challenge, the game being played at Kennington Oval, London, in 1878. Their appearance on the field created a lot of enthusiasm, and their play a great deal more. In spite of having to play the game under the English throw-in rule—a rule quite foreign to the Scots—they beat the English Cup-holders by three goals to one, and the Cockneys were not slow to show their appreciation of the clever play of the Scotch players, each of whom got a very demonstrative ovation as they went back to the Pavilion.

The names of that now very historic 1876 Vale team are: W. C. Wood (goalkeeper); A. M'Intyre and A. Michie (backs); W. Jamieson and A. M'Lintock (half-backs); while the forwards were J. Ferguson, R. Paton, D. Lindsay, J. C. M'Gregor, J.

M'Dougall, and J. C. Baird. There are still six of them living, and several of them have had their golden wedding. These noted old players have a re-union every year, and I had the pleasurable privilege of being one of the guests to do honour to these old heroes a few Saturdays ago. For many years the Annual Outing was a very small affair—I mean, numerically—but, as I can verify, the smallness of the numbers was more than made up for by the joviality of all present. The trip was usually up Loch Lomond on a Saturday afternoon. A few years ago, however, the kind and generous thought suggested itself to the heart and mind of Mr. James Ferguson, of Prestwick and London—a native of the Vale—to invite the now more than ever historic old players of that 1876 team, plus a number of other friends, to an Annual Outing as his guests.

The trip this year was to Turnberry, and there were 105 friends, many of them notables of the past in Association Football, who sat down to dinner in the Hotel there to do honour to the five of the old Vale heroes present:

“Andy” M'Intyre, “Sandy” M'Lintock, “Davie” Lindsay, J. C. M'Gregor, and last, but not least, “Johnnie” Ferguson.

I have not spent, for a long time, a day that brought such real gladness to my heart as I did that Saturday afternoon at Turnberry. As I sat at the festive board and looked at the “old heroes,” and at a few other old friends, the scene appeared to me, if I may say so without sacrilege, as a miniature resurrection. With great clarity in my mind I could picture “Andy” M'Intyre's robust and brilliant back play; “Sandy” M'Lintock's great and successful bouts against that old Queen's Park forward—Jimmy Weir—the greatest dribbler, to my mind, of all time; the brilliant dribbling and never-say-die play of Lindsay and M'Gregor, and the whirlwind dashes of “Johnnie” Ferguson on the right wing. The latter has the everlasting honour of being the first provincial footballer to play for Scotland against England.

It was, as a very young boy, watching the play of these “giants of the past” that fired me with the ambition to never rest till I could emulate the spirit and play of these “great fellows.” Can it be wondered at that after so many decades have

come and gone since the seventies that to be in the company of these old heroes of mine, even for a day, brought so much sunshine into my heart?

Among the other old friends I met and cordially conversed with were : That Prince of Goalkeepers, Jimmy M'Aulay, now an Honorary Sheriff-Substitute of Dumbartonshire; Michael Paton, whom I had the pleasure of having as a partner twice in the Scotland v. England International; Andrew Hannah, the famous old Renton back; Alick Hamilton, that brilliant Queen's Park forward of my own time; my esteemed old friend, Johnnie M'Dowall; that great back, Tom Vallance, of the old Rangers Club; and a brother Internationalist in John M'Pherson, for years one of the stalwarts of the Vale of Leven Club, and a friend of everybody's. He is the live wire in carrying out all the arrangements in connection with these annual re-unions, and right well does he perform the duties.

Time precludes my relating many interesting experiences it has been my pleasure to have with those whose names I have mentioned. Let me close by saying that the names of the old heroes in that 1876 Vale Team are emblazoned on the records of Scottish Association football, and further, I think, that around their names there will always hang an imperishable halo of glory.