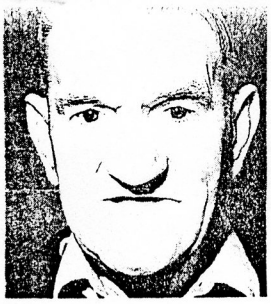


JACK STELLING
— tears.

CRYING OVER YEOVIL

The All-Time Great Matches

YEOVIL TOWN 2
SUNDERLAND 1
FA Cup Fourth Round
January 29, 1949

By PAUL TULLY

WHEN Jack Stelling walked in his front door on Sunday, January 30, 1949, he found his wife in tears. Without a word, she put her head on his shoulder and sobbed.

It sounds like the start of a romantic novel ... but in fact it was the aftermath of an FA Cup sensation Wearside has never forgotten.

"Esther was more of a Sunderland fan than most people," says Jack of his late wife, "and the Yeovil match got to her more than anyone on Wearside.

"The daft thing is, she started me off sobbing too, and there we were, both breaking our hearts over a football match."

But it was a football match with a difference. Southern League Yeovil Town, no-hopers against the might of First Division Sunderland, had shocked the football world with an epic 2-1 fourth round victory.

It was right-back Jack's worst moment in a decade at Roker Park and even today, 42 years later, he still hasn't heard the last of it.

"If the lads in the club want to have a little dig at me in fun, they always just say the word "Yeovil" and I'm beaten," he smiles.

"Back in '49 not only was Esther in tears but my dad nearly disowned me — he used to say: 'How could you let it happen?'

"And I don't know how it could have happened. When the draw was made, we thought it was a piece of cake.

"Not that over-confidence was any problem. We were a really good team then, with some quality players, and we knew how to approach any game.

"But somehow the whole thing just went against us on the day."

Cup-tie fever had enveloped the Somerset market town and a public holiday had been decalred. Yeovil were given brand new green shorts bearing the town's coat of arms to wear.

Tickets, like gold dust, were selling for many times their face value and the emotion of the nation was behind the non-leaguers.

It was into this cauldron that Sunderland travelled the day before the match, and by the Saturday kick-off time, excitement was at a peak.

Two other crucial factors were also in Yeovil's favour: the infamous slope on their Huish stadium pitch; and the fact that, in those difficult post-war years, extra-time would be played in the first game.

"The extra-time rule worked against us," recalls Jack, who still lives in his native Washington.

"They got their winner in the additional 30 minutes.

"The rules was in force because because it was just after the War, and the Government was trying to avoid people travelling long distances and taking time off work to do so.

"Yeovil were part-timers and a replay journey to Sunderland would have taken them away from their work.

"I remember running out onto the pitch and the crowd was virtually right up to the touchline, sitting on orange boxes at the front and all sorts of things.

"The atmosphere was tremendous but the fans were very close up to the touchline and it was the sort of thing we weren't used to.

"As for the slope — well, everyone asks about that but all I can say is that it didn't really affect me. I can't speak for the rest of the lads though psychologically Yeovil always made a lot of it."

Not surprisingly, the action was fierce from the start and Yeovil, with the slope in their favour first-half, threw everything at their First Division opponents.

The non-leaguers were on top early on and Alec Stock and Eric Bryant tested Roker keeper Johnny Mapson in the first three minutes.

Then Block put Hamilton through and Mapson was forced to scramble the ball behind for a corner.

There was a heartstopping moment when Bryant turned a corner into the net, but the referee had spotted the use of a hand and the goal was ruled out.

Shocked by the passion of their humble opponents, Sunderland took time to settle though Town goalkeeper Dyke — making his Yeovil debut -- was forced into a fine diving save from Ronnie Turnbull.

Within a minute, Ray Wright broke through the Roker rearguard but shot over the bar.

In the 17th minute, Yeovil were inches from taking the lead. The dangerous Bryant dribbled round Mapson and rolled the ball towards the open net.

But Mapson, making a miraculous recovery, raced back and managed to kick the ball to safety.

"They gave us hell," says Jack, "and we just couldn't get our game together.

"We had always known it was going to be a difficult game, and it turned out perhaps worse than we expected.

"But for all that, we were still very confident we wouldn't lose."

The Yeovil breakthrough came in the 28th minute when Wright headed on Hickman's free-kick for inside-right Alec Stock to loft a shot beyond Johnny Mapson and bring Huish to boiling point.

"Nobody was going to take the blame for that goal," says Jack. "Johnny (Mapson) was pointing and I was pointing but the one thing we couldn't argue about was the score.

"Once they got ahead, we knew we had a real battle on our hands."

The minnows still lead 1-0 at half-time but Sunderland had the slope in their favour after the interval.

"And that's when we got the upper hand. We were banging in th shots in the second half," says Jack.

"We hit the woodwork, hit the defenders, hit the goalkeeper — in fact, I think we hit everything but the corner flags.

"But at last we equalised, quite early in the second half, through Jackie Robinson."

It was on the hour that Dyke saved Ramsden's shot — then dropped the ball at the feet of Robinson for a gift goal.

"If the match had had to end at 90 minutes, we'd have got the 1-1 draw and brought them back to Roker Park, where we'd have absolutely murdered them.

"But of course we had to go into extra-time and they got that added advantage. It was unlucky for us, I supose, but we knew the position before we went to Yeovil and just had to make the best of it."

In the 114th minute, Yeovil were ahead again. Wright intercepted Shackleton's pass and slipped the ball inside for Bryant to beat Mapson comfortably.

Adds Jack: "Once it was 2-1 we were struggling, really struggling.

"With the crowd and everything else apparently against us, we had litle time to hit back. And of course we couldn't get a second equaliser, hard as we tried.

"Three minutes before the end, the referee blew his whistle for something and the fans thought it was the end of the game.

"On the pitch they came and they took some convincing that it wasn't quite all over. Then they took several minutes to move back off the pitch.

"When the final whistle did go, all we wanted to do was congratulate them and get off.

"But we could hardly move for people. I remember seeing Alec Stock out there and he was the happiest man in the country.

"It was terrible. We just sat there unable to believe what had happened. You hardly know what to do or say in those circumstances.

"We had fixed to stay in Yeovil on the Saturday night, and return home on the Sunday — but, I'll be honest, if I could have got a train back on the Saturday night I'd have got on it.

"Finally we got home on the Sunday afternoon and I went straight home to find Esther in tears and my dad saying he was going to disown me!!

"Going out and about in the days that followed, there were some serious insults flying around.

Happy days

"People would come up to me and say: "You're not worth your bread and butter," and it was hard to say anything in return.

"And even today, I've not been allowed to forget it. We get a few Newcastle fans in the Gardeners' Club here in Washington and they rib me about Yeovil this, Yeovil that, Yeovil the other.

"But at least since 1972 I've been able to get my own back by saying Hereford this, that and the other."

Jack was with Sunderland from 1944 to 1958, playing 259 League games and 13 FA Cup ties, for a total of eight goals from full-back.

He is still in regular touch with team-mates George Aitken, Billy Elliott and Tommy Reynolds and keeps golden memories of "those happy, happy days — despite Yeovil." "They were a wonderful set of lads aat Sunderland then," he says, "and there was a great spirit among us.

"When I first joined Sunderland, I got 12s 10d a week and later this was increased to 15s, though the bonuses were £1 a point so a couple of wins would help the income a bit.

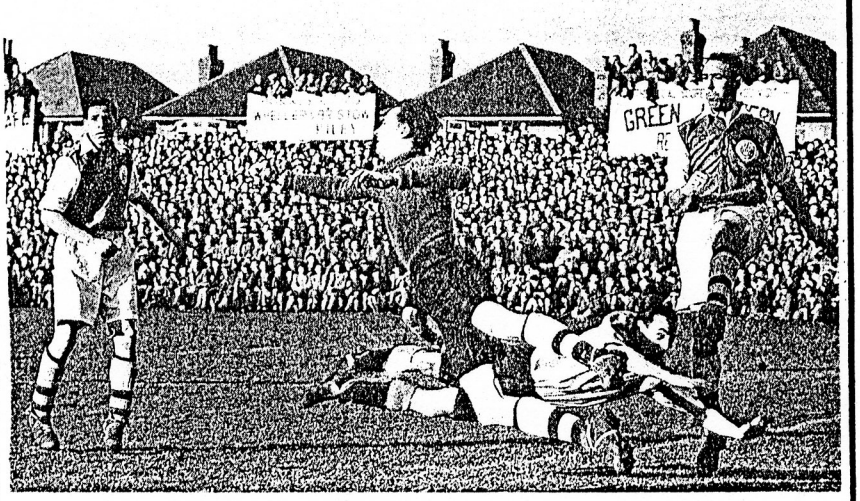
"But it wasn't so much about money in those days — it was more the fun and the honour of playing football.

"I don't get along to Roker Park so much since Esther died eight or nine years ago, but I do see the occasional game.

"Esther and I held season tickets all the years after I finished playing and if she was still alive today, I'd be at every game because she would have made sure I went with her."

Yeovil Town: Dyke, Hickman, Davis, Keeton, Blizzard, Collins, Hamilton, Stock, Bryant, Hargreaves, Wright.

Sunderland: Mapson, Stelling Ramsden, Watson, Hall, Wright, Duns, Robinson, Turnbull, Shackleton, Reynolds.



GOALMOUTH ACTION from the Yeovil v Sunderland encounter back on January 29, 1949.

TOMORROW: Newcastle's 1958 six-five special against Chelsea