

FAITH and PRIDE

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ONE of the greatest mistakes anyone can make in Soccer is to suggest to Bill Shankly that Liverpool at any time are not doing well. I made that mistake once.

It was just after Liverpool had rejoined the First Division. Shankly's defence of his team was complete. At such times the gravel voice becomes thicker, the Scottish accent broader. It is not always easy to understand ALL the words — it is impossible not to understand the FULL meaning.

Shankly's faith in his team cannot be shaken. That, perhaps as much as the undoubted ability of that team, has brought Liverpool almost unequalled success over the past three years.

They have won one League title and are well on the way to a second. They have won the F.A. Cup. They have become one of Europe's most-powerful and most feared teams.

Shankly is volatile, explosive and full of pride. He demands extreme effort from his players in training as well as on match days. He gets it and he deserves it.

Of course, Liverpool are not perfect; of course, Shankly knows it, and his players know it. But faith, they say, can move mountains — and Shankly proclaims his faith in Liverpool with a fervour which MUST inspire his players.

He once said: "There's only one way to do anything in football — that's flat-out. I want a man who will go through a brick wall with a broken leg . . . and still come out the other side shooting for goal. If he can do that, he is good enough to play for Liverpool!"

I have no doubt he would have set similar standards and shown the same pride had he still been at Carlisle, Grimsby, Huddersfield or Workington, where he has also managed footballers.

Undoubtedly, Shankly is a football fanatic. As a player he asked and gave no quarter. He won caps for Scotland and appeared in two F.A. Cup finals with Preston.

The measure of his fanaticism may be judged by the fact that when Liverpool played West Ham in the 1964 Charity Shield, Shankly went among his beloved Kop fans and talked with them. Not a man there could boast greater pride in the Anfield club.

Like fellow-Scot Matt Busby — equally Soccer-wise but so different in approach — Shankly left the pits for football. After 16 League games with Carlisle, he was sought by Preston — and turned them down.

After his brother, Sandy, exploded: "You're daft, man!" Shankly changed his mind, caught up with the Preston representative as the train was moving out of the station and signed, *en route* for Newcastle. The fee: £500. Shankly

was 18 and happy at Carlisle — but he stayed 16 years with Preston.

It was characteristic when, on the eve of an international against England, he had to pull out — because it was found he had been playing for months with a badly displaced cartilage.

"If there is anything I demand in a footballer, it is courage and toughness," he has said. No-one can accuse him of lacking either quality.

As a manager, he showed courage when he bought big for Liverpool — Ron Yeats, Gordon Milne, Willie Stevenson, Ian St. John, Peter Thompson, Geoff Strong, Phil Chisnall and John Ogston.

The last three have not been able to hold regular first-team places — but

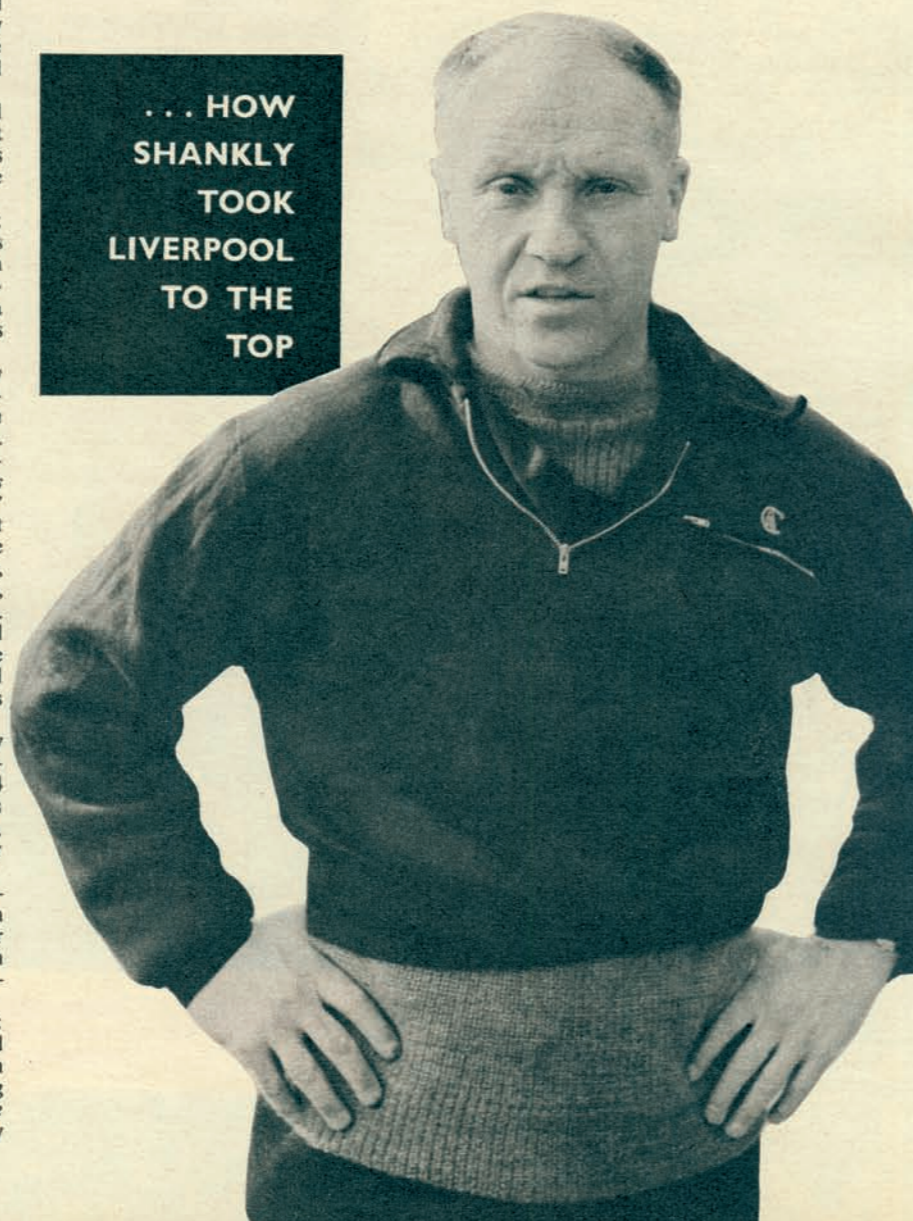
Strong has been rated the best stand-in in First Division football. And at Wembley last year, he amply repaid the £40,000 fee Liverpool gave Arsenal for him.

Whenever I see Shankly, I think of the story which stems from a Blackpool victory at Anfield. It was a shock. One fan, imitating Shankly's Scottish burr, observed: "The Fitba' League will never-r-r accept this result!"

I do not think Shankly would have gone that far, because he is a realist, and knows you cannot win them all.

Today, Shankly is leading his red-shirted warriors towards new conquests. And I will bet he is already plotting how to get his hands on the European Cup next season!

... HOW SHANKLY TOOK LIVERPOOL TO THE TOP



▲ April 1966

CHARLES BUCHAN'S

FOOTBALL

JUNE, 1966

MONTHLY



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CUP FINAL SPECIAL