

STORY

After a game with the town team I used to rush to see our League side play . . . now

I am in the place of my boyhood hero

THE evening of April 30, 1954, was Cup Final Eve, only a few hours before the Wembley game between West Bromwich and Preston North End. It was on that evening, with Soccer fervour rising to a high pitch for the big game, that I played in my first major representative game.

Old England versus Young England was the tag given to this tussle at Highbury Stadium. Both teams had much incentive to win—the experienced players to prove they were still the best in the game; we youngsters to try and move further up the ladder of fame.

My team lost 2—1, but never have I felt it less a disgrace to be on the losing side.

As an inside-forward, I naturally had particular interest in the players occupying similar positions for Old England—Wilf Mannion and Len Shackleton.

What a display those two gave! Their wonderful tricks, skill, and defence-splitting passes brought home to me just how much I had to learn.

Their exhibition was something I had never seen before, and have not seen since. Absolute masters of their profession, they gave our defence a real grueling, and taught me more than I have learned from any other dozen matches.



JACKIE BLANCHFLOWER . . . one of the youngsters Mr. Busby brought into the team.

by **DENIS VIOLLET**
Manchester United

To top off a wonderful week-end, I had a stand seat for the Final the next day. But perhaps I expected too much, after watching Wilf and Len, for this game left me very disappointed.

If ever I felt sympathy for a player it was for Preston's Tommy Docherty, who had a penalty given against him from which West Bromwich scored.

Tommy had previously rallied his team magnificently. I would sooner play in front of this great Scot than against him, for he fights to the last second and refuses to admit defeat.

But there are many fine wing-halves in addition to Docherty.

For instance . . . Danny Blanchflower, Len Phillips, Jimmy Scoular, Bill Slater, Bill McGarry, Roy Paul. The list could go on for ever!

No other position seems to have such an abundance of stars. Even Billy Wright and Harry Johnston played on the wing before they switched to centre.

As a lad, my ambition was always to play for Manchester United. On Saturday mornings I would play for my local team, then rush off to watch the League side.



Stan Pearson, a dark-haired inside-left who never seemed to play a bad game, was my hero.

I little thought the day would come when I would be the player to succeed him in the United team.

But it happened—late in 1953, when the club struck a poor run and struggled near the bottom of the First Division.

Mr. Busby also brought in a number of other young players, like Duncan Edwards and Jackie Blanchflower. We had a no-score draw at Huddersfield, and seemed to blend together.

I do not feel enough credit was given to our captain and centre-half, Allenby Chilton, for the change in the team's fortunes.

With so many immature, inexperienced players round him, Chilton had to put



STAN PEARSON . . . my hero who never seemed to play a bad game.

in tremendous work. He was a constant inspiration to us, and held the team together.

Tall and strong, he dominated the defence, quickly covered up mistakes, encouraged each player, and somehow found time occasionally to make a break-away on his own.

On the field, Chilton, who is now with Grimsby, never minced words. He would tell us exactly what was wanted—but never held off-field inquests.

Our manager, Mr. Busby, also has the art of criticising in such a way that you can always take his words without ill-feeling.



He has done much to improve my play, and we all realise that whatever he says is for our benefit and that of the team.

I well recall how, when I was fifteen and had decided to go to Old Trafford, I told former England goalkeeper Frank Swift of my choice.

"You will not find a better man anywhere than Matt Busby," Frank said. "You should have a great future under him."

I can give no better illustration of how players are considered at United than to mention the benefit payments recently made to four of us.

Each of us is a young player, none with five years' professional service. But we received maximum benefits—one year of amateur service counting in some cases.

Every player can recall his first League goal, and I am no exception—mainly because surprise nearly made me miss it.

We were playing West Bromwich, at Old Trafford. I got the ball, beat two men, and looked up. Bang in front of me was the goal.

For a moment I could not move my legs. Then I tried a shot. I miskicked the ball, but, luckily, it went into a corner of the net.

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