



DAVID TOSSELL

# THE GREAT ENGLISH FINAL

1953: CUP, CORONATION & STANLEY MATTHEWS



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# INTRODUCTION

*“The climax to the 1953 final may have been dramatic but there were more skilful Cup Finals in that era that are largely forgotten. It was the combination of different narratives that were not centred upon the actual play in the 1953 final that have ensured the game’s place in popular memory.”* – Martin Johnes and Gavin Mellor, *The 1953 FA Cup Final: Modernity and Tradition in British Culture*.

I WENT there in search of ghosts, but the few I found were in unlikely places. I’m not sure exactly what I expected to encounter on a bitterly cold November day at Bolton’s Reebok Stadium that would hark back to a sunny afternoon in May 1953, when Blackpool’s orange-jerseyed heroes had scored three times in the final 20 minutes at Wembley to fulfil the burning ambition of Stanley Matthews, the country’s most-famous and most-

loved player. I certainly wasn't harbouring notions of seeing the spectre of the great winger materialise among the burly athleticism of a modern Premier League match. And no one had turned up expecting drama and excitement to match that 4-3 epic almost six decades earlier. I just knew that Bolton Wanderers' home game against Blackpool, the clubs' first meeting in England's top division since 1968 – 42 years earlier – had exerted a magnetism over someone studying the most famous of all matches between these teams.

Blackpool's fans arrived dressed in orange, just as the famously flamboyant Atomic Boys had done at their club's biggest matches in the years after the Second World War. Yet where once this band of brothers had worn colourful tailored suits, even oriental outfits with turbans, and had carried an orange-dyed duck as a mascot, their 21st century ancestors were more predictably attired in polyester replica jerseys emblazoned with the kind of commercial messaging unthinkable in the 1950s. With 90 minutes to go before kick-off, however, a frisson of nudges and nods outside the stadium's main entrance revealed that the sartorial spirit of the old-school fan was still alive. Barely a head remained unturned as BBC radio reporter and *It's A Knockout* legend Stuart Hall, a man synonymous with a more uncomplicated age, strode jovially through the glass doors wearing a thigh-length fur coat over mustard-coloured trousers. No duck, though.

Nor, on this day, was there anyone to remotely challenge the popularity of Matthews, the acclaimed "Wizard of the Dribble", whose quest to claim a winner's medal at Wembley at the third attempt had diverted the watching nation from its anticipation of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II a month later. Charlie Adam, a skilful Scottish midfielder who in bygone days could have been a devastating foil for Matthews as an old-fashioned wing-half or inside-forward, was the best Blackpool could

offer. Appropriately he was the first man to step off the team coach, acknowledging the cheers as he walked briskly towards the players' entrance.

Once the article in the matchday programme about the famous final had been absorbed, the contemporary football on display served to delete my black and white images of 1953 as effectively as if I had hit the off button on my DVD player while viewing the often-blurry BBC footage and been assaulted by MTV instead. It did seem appropriate, at least, to discover via an advertising hoarding that Bolton's current full-backs – heirs to the legacy of uncomplicated muscle men such as Tommy and Ralph Banks, Roy Hartle and Johnny Ball – were sponsored by a tattoo parlour.

And there was a late comeback, although this time it was Bolton who scored twice in the final 15 minutes to achieve a draw against a visiting team who had no intention of sitting on a 2-0 lead away from home even when it would have been advisable and excusable. Quite right, the Blackpool of Mortensen and Matthews and skipper Harry Johnston would have said.

When, six months later, the teams reconvened at Bloomfield Road for the Seasiders' last home game during their brief reacquaintance with English football's top level it was on FA Cup Final day no less. The estimated 1953 final audience of ten million had been enough to finally convince the football authorities to move the sport's biggest showpiece away from the concluding weekend of the League schedule. Yet now, for the first time since Matthews's finest hour, the Cup finalists would have to share their day, victims of the demands placed upon Wembley by the UEFA Champions League, the monolith of modern club football. As if to remind everyone of how things once were, the fates, the gods and some sub-standard defending contrived to produce a final score of Blackpool 4 Bolton Wanderers 3. Those ghosts had finally turned up.



TWO MILLION more people watched the 1953 FA Cup Final – many on friends’ and neighbours’ sets – than tuned in for the Manchester City–Stoke City final of 2011, which kicked off just as the Blackpool and Bolton players were arriving back in the Bloomfield Road dressing room. Such figures say much about the position of the competition in football’s 21st century priority list, but also about its place in the country’s consciousness almost six decades earlier.

Although not the first Wembley final to be televised live, the 1953 showpiece was the first to achieve a significant audience. On top of the viewing public, almost as many again listened to it on the radio. And it was a shared experience for most, with the ten million who watched on BBC sitting around the fewer than five million televisions in British homes at the time. Many of those sets, nine-inch screens set in teak or walnut cabinets, were recent additions as electrical stores enjoyed a rush of people eager to purchase prior to the planned live broadcast of the Coronation ceremonies.

Author and sports sociologist Garry Whannel would state that the events at Wembley on 2nd May 1953 constituted, after Roger Bannister’s first sub four-minute mile and the 1966 World Cup Final, “probably the most mythologised moment in British sporting history”. The reasons it has endured over six decades, why modern fans whose fathers were born years after the game know the narrative details of “The Matthews Final”, are manifold.

Not least in importance is the fact that the Coronation-induced television boom contrived to take the Cup Final to the masses in exactly the year that many more casual fans had found a reason to follow the game – in one Stanley Matthews, whose England debut had been almost two decades earlier, who was the first-ever Footballer of the Year and who, as he approached the end of his fourth

decade, was assumed to be on the verge of leaving the sport he had graced. The manner in which his storyline captivated a wider audience beyond the traditional working-class followers of the sport made it one of the most significant moments in the widening of football's social boundaries.

It is easy to see a comparison with the way that, in 1990, a British public disaffected with the national game after Heysel, Hillsborough and countless hooliganism-related problems rekindled its old passion via another humanitarian tale, Paul Gascoigne's tears at the World Cup semi-final. Just as the affair with Gazza was to be almost instantly consummated by the glossy arrival of Sky Sports and the cash-rich Premier League, the Matthews love story was nurtured – albeit in a more reserved, front-parlour manner – by the sport's steadily escalating courtship with the media over the next decade, culminating in the arrival of *Match of the Day* in 1964.

As Dave Russell notes when discussing the 1953 final in his social history of the sport, *Football and the English*: “That so many, even those who were not close followers of the sport, experienced the novelty of watching a national hero win an honour which had previously eluded him not only gave this game in particular a privileged place in football history, but gave the sport in general an enhanced status.”

Neville Cardus, the doyen of cricket writers, was even moved to write to *The Times* after the game suggesting that football was usurping his favoured sport as the game of the British people. It is no coincidence that the inevitable shallowing of football's post-war attendance figures since the high-water mark of the 1948/49 season was momentarily reversed in the season that immediately followed such a captivating Wembley final.

It is possible, too, to look back now and see the game as being indicative of Britain standing at an important



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crossroads in its recent history, as endorsed by Martin Johnes and Gavin Mellor in their 2006 article, *The 1953 FA Cup Final: Modernity and Tradition in British Culture*. In it, they contend:

It was also a match that was intertwined with the ideas of modernity and tradition that ran through British culture in the early 1950s. The new Queen, present at the game, represented optimism in the future, an optimism closely linked with a technological progress that was epitomised by television... Yet, as the loyalty towards the monarchy and the celebration of a respectable working-class hero like Matthews showed, British culture also remained profoundly attached to older traditions.

The wholehearted, cynicism-free embrace of Matthews's search for the Cup winner's medal that had eluded him in two previous finals was in some ways a mirror of the country's conservative – and Conservative – reinstallation of the old warhorse Sir Winston Churchill as Prime Minister in 1951. It was Britain's way of placing its very own old-fashioned heroes up on pedestals at a time when the country itself had been slipping down the pecking order of the world's most powerful nations.

That combined mood of national chest-beating and lauding of have-a-go heroes would continue on into the summer. First, a British-led Everest expedition under the guidance of John Hunt became the first to successfully climb the world's highest mountain – never mind that it was a New Zealander, Edmund Hillary, and Sherpa companion Tenzing Norgay who actually stood on the summit. The sporting arena saw 49-year-old Gordon Richards, the nation's most popular jockey, win his first Derby after 32 years in the saddle, before Len Hutton's

England cricket team beat Australia in the fifth Test at The Oval to regain the Ashes for the first time since 1934. The Coronation honours list would even bestow cricket's first knighthood on Jack Hobbs, rewarded for a remarkable three-decade career in which he had broken all the game's batting records.

The support for men such as Matthews, Hobbs and Richards both reinforced and reflected the spirit of social unity that existed in the country. The shared experience of six years of conflict was still a powerful force and it was a period of political consensus. The post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee had managed to demonstrate concern for the underprivileged without alienating the middle and upper classes, and all parties – despite the recent change of government – remained committed to the development of the welfare state.<sup>1</sup> Although many effects of post-war austerity still lingered by the time Blackpool were embarking on their journey to Wembley in the first weeks of 1953, there was an undoubted improvement in the economics and comforts of most people's everyday lives. It was, according to historian David Kynaston, “the breakthrough year in terms of moving away from austerity and towards improved living standards and even a measure of affluence”. One effect was to make the population more enamoured of their country's figureheads, more ready to embrace the monarchy. In particular they were in thrall to their glamorous new Queen and excited at the prospect of celebrating her big day.

According to Johnes and Mellor: “This was all more than mere symbolism. The 1953 Cup Final was reported and constructed by the press in line with these other

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1 When the Conservative party regained power in 1951, it kept intact the National Health Service unveiled by Labour's health minister Aneurin Bevan three years earlier and made no attempt to tear up the Attlee government's plans for the nationalisation of industries.

cultural currents, helping shape how people thought about the Britain in which they lived.”

Significantly, *The Times* led its matchday preview with the presence of the Queen at Wembley, while the *Sunday Times* followed up with the headline “QUEEN SEES BLACKPOOL WIN 4-3”. Even in the wake of its local team’s victory, the press in Blackpool made much of the Mayor’s reaction to meeting Elizabeth, who he described as “just wonderful – a charming person”.

It was little wonder then that 20.5 million people in Britain, including 56 per cent of all adults, eventually watched live TV coverage of the Coronation, approximately 12 million of them doing so in pubs, cinemas or the homes of others.

A further 11.7 million were estimated to have listened to the ceremony on the radio. The loveable, youthful Elizabeth, and the inclusive nature of her Coronation, went a long way towards re-establishing the reputation of the monarchy, which had suffered through the pre-war abdication of Edward VIII. The wave of goodwill she rode to the throne was evidenced by the outrage caused when the *Manchester Guardian* described the Coronation as “a £100,000 spree”.

American sociologist Edward Shills called the Coronation “an act of national communion”, adding that “one family was knit together with another in one great national family through identification with the monarchy”. Change Coronation to Cup Final and monarchy to Matthews and he could have been talking about the climax of the football season.

As early as the following day, *The Times* was putting forward a prescient explanation about why the game would continue to occupy a prominent place in the public memory, beyond just the excitement of the action: “It will largely because here in the presence of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh the game of football, the game

of the people, was crowned with all felicity in this year of Coronation and national rejoicing.”

Put simply, the same game played a year earlier or later, while dramatic, would not have acquired the same almost-mythical status. It benefits from the veneer that other events, sporting and cultural, have layered upon the perception of the year of 1953. As Johnes and Mellor contend: “The links to the Coronation, with all its connotations of a reverent, unified and optimistic Britain, enhanced such memories.”

When it comes to the football itself, the game was also to become viewed as the glorious last stand of the traditional ‘British’ style of football; all tricky wingers, bulldozing centre-forwards and uncompromising whack-it-anywhere defenders. Even here, though, there are comparisons with the wider historical narrative of the country. “The mood of pride and optimism that the Cup Final caught proved to be short-lived,” write Johnes and Mellor. “By the end of the decade, the Suez crisis had shattered any sense of national confidence and revealed the major fissures in the political consensus.”

On the field, things fell apart even more quickly. Barely had the sport finished congratulating itself on being able to serve up such excitement and human drama than the Hungarian national team turned up on the same Wembley turf and broke down English football’s walls of self-satisfaction with a stunning 6-3 victory. The flaws laid bare by Ferenc Puskas and his colleagues were exposed even more savagely the following year when Hungary won the return game 7-1 on their own soil.

As author and football historian Jonathan Wilson points out: “The golden age, if not of any great success, then at least of the old, winger-oriented style of English football was at an end... That final stands as its apogee.”

It is easy to pick fault with the football in that year’s Cup Final; not for its lack of red-blooded excitement but

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for the kind of naivety that would soon be exposed on the international stage. Yet few were aware of such things as Matthews was being feted for his achievement. Even fewer would have cared. Just as British industry in the 1950s was content with its complacency and unaware of the impending challenge of rapidly-modernising foreign competition, so football was happy to revel in the popular theatre of the domestic game. Who is to say they were wrong?

As the country watched and listened on the first Saturday in May, tactical nuances and the state of the national game were an irrelevance, incapable of impinging on the day's significance. Rather, the merging of historical, cultural and personal narratives – allied to a bloody exciting game of football – made the FA Cup Final of 1953 an iconic and enduring moment in the history of English sport. This is the story of that remarkable event.

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE FOLLOWING biographies are extracted from the *Charles Buchan's Football Monthly Who's Who in the Football League* for 1952/53. Where no entry existed for certain players or where the author has added additional comment, this is written in italics.

## BLACKPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB

**George Farm** (goalkeeper): Capped by Scotland. Joined Blackpool from Hibernian in 1948. Diligent practice allied to his courage have made a cool, fine keeper with an unusual style – deceptively nonchalant. Played in the '51 final. Height 5-11. Weight 12-10.

**Eddie Shimwell** (right-back): A tall, hefty full-back who played for England v Sweden in 1949. Rose to fame with Sheffield United. Joined Blackpool in December, 1946. Strong kick with either foot, he scored from the spot in the 1948 final and was at Wembley again in 1951. Height 5-11. Weight 12-0.

**Tommy Garrett** (left-back): Made an outstanding international debut for England against Scotland at Hampden in April 1952. Durham-born, he cost Blackpool

only £10 from junior football. Shows dash and strength, combined with a cool head. Height 5-10½. Weight 12-10.

**Ewan Fenton** (right-half): A promising young half-back, Blackpool developed, who played for the Army while serving in the Hussars. Height 5-7½. Weight 11-0.

**Harry Johnston** (centre-half): Deservedly Footballer of the Year for 1951. A magnificent wing-half; strong in the tackle, splendidly artistic; constructive and cool. Has several England caps. Born by the Manchester City ground, but Blackpool signed him from Droylsden Athletic. He skippered them in the 1948 and 1951 finals. Height 5-11. Weight 12-8.

**Cyril Robinson** (left-half): *Limited chances at Blackpool but injuries to team-mates saw him picked for Wembley, the youngest and last-surviving member of his club's Wembley line-up.*

**Stanley Matthews** (outside-right): Probably the finest outside-right of all-time. Born at Hanley in February, 1915. Was taken on the Stoke City ground staff and remained with the club until Blackpool signed him in 1947 for £11,000. As a schoolboy he once scored ten from centre-half, but in 1929 appeared for England schoolboys on the right wing. The first of his England caps was won at 19. Height 5-8½. Weight 11-0.

**Ernie Taylor** (inside-right): A little inside-forward with speed, ball control and a quick eye for the open space. Did much to help Newcastle win the 1951 Cup, then went to Blackpool later that year. Ernie was born at Sunderland, shone with the local school's side, and was snapped up by Newcastle. Served with submarines during the war. Shoots with surprising power. Height 5-4. Weight 10-8.

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**Stan Mortensen** (centre-forward): A dashing, courageous, raiding inside or centre-forward, was born in County Durham. Signed by Blackpool before the war while a lad. Was nearly discarded then for being too slow. Shone with Bath City and the RAF during the war. Played in the Cup Finals of 1948 and 1951. Height 5-9½. Weight 11-8.

**Jackie Mudie** (inside-left): A house painter, he joined 'Pool from Lochee Harp, Dundee, as a centre-forward. Played in the 1951 final when 21. Born Dundee. Height 5-6½. Weight 11-0.

**Bill Perry** (outside-left): Had a good game in the 1951 final. A South African outside-left, recommended to Blackpool by the old Bolton winger, Billy Butler, and signed from Johannesburg Rangers in 1949, when 19. Fast, persistent and a snatcher of scoring opportunities. Height 5-8½. Weight 11-10.

**Joe Smith** (manager): *Would spend 23 years as Blackpool manager, having scored for Bolton in the first Wembley final in 1923 and captained them to two FA Cup successes.*

**Allan Brown:** Inside-forward. Allan was originally a wing-half and has been picked for Scotland in both positions. A fine ball player and opportunist. Left East Fife for Blackpool in 1950/51 after a long dispute which kept him out of the game several months. First capped for Scotland 1950, v Switzerland. Height 5-10. Weight 11-6.

**Hugh Kelly:** Was given his first Scottish cap against the USA in May 1952. A strong-tackling courageous, skilful left-half who joined Blackpool from Jeanfield Swifts in 1943, playing for Blackpool in the 1948 and 1951 finals. His friendship caused Allan Brown to join Blackpool. Height 5-10. Weight 11-10.



**John Crosland:** A centre-half who became an emergency left-back for the 1948 Cup Final. Played for England B in 1950. Height 5-11. Weight 11-4.

## BOLTON WANDERERS FOOTBALL CLUB

**Stan Hanson** (goalkeeper): A fine goalkeeper; unspectacular but an excellent positional player. Never flurried, with very safe hands. Born Bootle. Liverpool gave him trials but didn't sign him. Joined Bolton, August 1935. Height 5-9½. Weight 13-4.

**John Ball** (right-back): A Manchester United product, and caught the eye by his cool display on his debut in a 1949 Cup tie at Hull. Joined Bolton 1950. Has played for the Football League. Height 5-8½. Weight 11-0.

**Ralph Banks** (left-back): *Older brother of reserve defender Tommy; would leave Bolton soon after the 1953 final.*

**Johnny Wheeler** (right-half): Strongly-built Liverpool-born right-half. Can also play inside-right. Cost Bolton a forward and a fee when he joined them from Tranmere Rovers in 1950/51. Has played for England B. Height 5-8½. Weight 12-1½.

**Malcolm Barrass** (centre-half): Won a Victory England cap against Wales at inside-left in 1945. His next appearance for England was at centre-half! In the interim, he had rather faded from the picture, becoming a left-half and then re-emerged as a pivot. A big fellow with good positional sense who never takes unfair advantage of his size. Born Blackpool. Height 5-10½. Weight 13-4.

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**Eric Bell** (left-half): *Wing-half who spent all of his eight years as a professional at Bolton and whose injury would be a pivotal moment in the 1953 Cup Final.*

**Doug Holden** (outside-right): A young outside-right whom Bolton brought into their First Division side in 1951/52. Born in Manchester, he joined the Trotters from Manchester YMCA. Height 5-7. Weight 10-0.

**Willie Moir** (inside-right): Dark, curly hair. Topped the First Division goalscorers with 25 goals in 1948/49. Played for Scotland v England at Hampden in 1950. Born Bucksburn. Height 5-7½. Weight 9-13.

**Nat Lofthouse** (centre-forward): Began to play for the Wanderers side when 15. A very strong player, immensely courageous. Powerful with head and foot. Works hard and most intelligently. First of his England caps came against Yugoslavia in 1950, when he scored two goals. Height 5-9½. Weight 11-13.

**Harold Hassall** (inside-left): Shining new inside-forward, star of season 1950/51, his first as a Huddersfield Town regular. Born 1929 and a qualified physiotherapist who intends to become a PT schoolmaster. He first shone in the Army representative side. A surprise choice for England v Scotland, April 1951, he scored a terrific goal. Tall, powerful, long-striding and a fine shot. Height 5-11. Weight 11-8. To Bolton in season 1951/52.

**Bobby Langton** (outside-left): One of the cleverest left wingers in the League. Has a powerful left-foot shot. Originally a Blackburn Rover. Born at Burscough, he moved to Preston (1948) and to Bolton for £20,000 in 1949. Has many England caps. Height 5-7½. Weight 11-0.

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**Bill Ridding** (manager): *Former player and physiotherapist; in the second full season of a managerial reign that would last 17 years.*

**Tommy Banks:** Like his brother, Tommy is a full-back born at Farnworth, who has been developed by Bolton. Height 5-7½. Weight 12-6.

**Roy Hartle:** *Another physical player who became a Bolton stalwart at full-back after missing out on the 1953 final, having played in every game before Wembley.*

**George Higgins:** A Blackburn Rovers product, albeit he was born at Dundee. A full-back, standing 5-7½ and weighing 9-12. In early season 1951/52 he moved to Bolton.

**Vince Pilling:** *Winger who was officially the Bolton 12th man at Wembley.*

**Ray Parry:** Made his debut at inside-left for Bolton at the early age of 15 in season 1951/52. Outstanding as a schoolboy international. Brother of Jack Parry of Derby County. Height: 5-8½. Weight 11-2.

## OTHERS

**Queen Elizabeth II:** *In the second year of her reign after acceding to the throne following the death of her father King George VI early in 1952. Her Coronation in 1953, one month after she attended the FA Cup Final, was to symbolise her country's passage from post-war austerity into a new age of optimism and prosperity.*

**Kenneth Wolstenholme:** *A boyhood Bolton fan and wartime RAF bomber pilot who progressed from print journalism and radio to become the voice of the BBC's televised football for two decades, enjoying his finest moment during the 1966 World Cup Final.*

# CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN

*“I’m sorry we couldn’t bring you the Cup, but we’ll go back. We’ll go back and win the Cup yet.”* – skipper Harry Johnston to Blackpool fans after the 1951 FA Cup Final.

THE VOICES can be heard in spite of the distance and the concrete; their song muffled yet unmistakable: *Abide with Me*, the hymn of the FA Cup Final. Harry Johnston, centre-half and captain of Blackpool, takes it as his cue to pick up a football from the floor of Wembley’s north dressing room, running his hands over the polished leather and fingering the laces.

Outside, clasping their *Daily Express*-sponsored lyrics sheets, the crowd have been filling time before the entrance of the two teams by engaging enthusiastically in the ‘Community Singing’, accompanied by the band of the Coldstream Guards and conducted from his raised podium

by Arthur Caiger, the white-suited and bespectacled London headmaster who has been waving his arms around at English football's showpiece ever since the war. As the final notes fade, song sheets are tucked into jacket pockets to be kept as souvenirs and eyes turn excitedly towards the east end of the stadium. Not long now.

Blackpool manager Joe Smith, buttoned snugly into his new three-piece suit, has given his final instructions. Never one for elaborate game plans it could hardly be described as a tactical briefing. "Don't be put off by the occasion," he warned his men, "or by the fact that we've lost two previous finals. Go out and play your natural game. Just try to be your own normal selves. Be the players I know you are and we'll be all right. Whatever happens, remember you're my boys and I'm proud of every damn one of you."

He had then paused, letting the painful memories of the team's two Wembley defeats hang in the air. "And let's win this one."

At ten minutes to three, the match referee, Mervyn Griffiths, a schoolteacher from Abertillery, orders the sounding of the buzzer that beckons the teams from their dressing rooms. Johnston opens the door and leads his players into the corridor, waiting for Smith to place his trilby on his head and take his place at the head of the line, giving one final rallying cry: "We dream brave dreams, eh? So be brave, lads."

The white-shirted players of Bolton Wanderers line up on Blackpool's left. The man with whom Johnston will be occupied for most of the afternoon, Bolton centre-forward Nat Lofthouse, has prior Wembley experience yet even he is unprepared for the heightened anxiety that grips him; unlike anything he has experienced in his four appearances there for England. "When you stand in the tunnel at Wembley you might be in another world," he explains many years later. "All you can see of the stadium is a small square of light some 20 or 30 yards ahead. The other side

lines up alongside you. There will be a joke and a laugh but the tension is there. Then you start the long walk towards that square of light.”

Behind Lofthouse is left-back Ralph Banks, a relative veteran at the age of 33, but still five years younger than the man he will be marking and at whom he can't resist throwing a glance. Having fought throughout the Second World War, Banks has seen enough of life – and death – not to be intimidated by the threat posed by the great Stanley Matthews, the man with more knowledge of Wembley's pitch than anyone on either side and who has, it seems, the whole country willing him to win an FA Cup winner's medal. Even he is being tormented by the occasion, admitting later that he “never felt worse in my life before a match”.

Banks had at last come up against England's most renowned footballer for the first time in his career earlier in the season and felt he had acquitted himself well. Of greater concern than his esteemed opponent is his own fitness over the course of 90 minutes. Fearing that his shins will be susceptible to cramp on the testing Wembley pitch, he has been assiduously massaging oil into them in the dressing room. If he knew how events will play out, he might still be in there working on his limbs.

Johnston, Matthews, Lofthouse, Banks and their team-mates clack their boots along the players' tunnel, the upward incline meaning that blue sky is all that is visible at the end of their journey. Suddenly, spring sunshine dazzles Johnston's sight after the gloom of the stadium's bowels and the paint-stripper roar of 100,000 voices almost stops him in his tracks. According to team-mate Ewan Fenton: “When you walk down the tunnel at Wembley, it is very, very quiet. Then as you approach the pitch and hear 100,000 people cheering, you think this is what it must have been like for the Christians at the Coliseum.”

Two years earlier, Johnston had been through this same routine; making the identical walk and finding himself waiting, as now, to introduce his colleagues to a member of the royal family. One thought dominated his mind on that occasion. "This time it's got to be us," he had repeated to himself over and over, unable to clear his mind of his team's defeat to Manchester United three years previously. Now he has a second Wembley defeat, to Newcastle, to dismiss from his thoughts.

At 33 years old, he is determined to remain more at ease in his third FA Cup Final for his only professional team, taking in the surroundings on what he knows might be his last appearance on such a stage. Dry-mouthed, he looks towards the sideline and sees injured team-mates Allan Brown and Hugh Kelly taking their seats on the bench. Alongside them is team trainer John Lynas, attired in a smart blazer, sharply creased flannels, tie and sweater, his football boots being the only clue to the role he expects to play in the course of the afternoon.

Behind the goal, the orange scarves, hats and favours worn by the Blackpool fans punctuate the terraces like splashes of paint. Johnston searches for relatives, but amid the more uniform grey of the stands, where the predominantly male gathering sits soberly in jackets and ties, it is hard to distinguish individuals. Instead, what catches his eye are the dresses in which the small number of female spectators have decked themselves out. The warmth of early May seems to have brought out the frocks that they'll likely be wearing again in a month's time at the street parties to celebrate the Coronation of the new young Queen, Elizabeth II. Johnston can't help thinking that, placed alongside the explosion of colour in the pitch-side flower beds below the Royal Box, it appears as though the entire playing area is flanked by a magnificent extended herbaceous border. Funny what your mind comes up with at moments of high tension, he notes.



Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, performs the pre-game ceremonial duties on behalf of his wife of five and a half years, who is attending her first football match as reigning monarch and from whom Johnston hopes to be receiving the famous trophy in a couple of hours. The Duke is guided along the line of players, receiving bare-arm handshakes from men who have rolled up their sleeves in the hope of making their heavy cotton shirts more comfortable in the heat. Johnston is impressed by the royal guest's apparent interest in all the players and unsurprised when he pauses for a longer word with Matthews. Even Lofthouse notices it, accepting the situation: "Everybody in England, except the people of Bolton, wanted Stanley to get his medal. We had a huge emotional barrier to break down."

The winning of a Football League championship may be the truest testament of a team's ability, but in 1953 it is still the FA Cup that shines most gloriously in the vision of the population. Winning it now, before the Queen and with more people than ever watching the whole game live on television, will be the most fitting climax to a career that is widely assumed to be approaching its conclusion.

Unknown to Johnston, he and Matthews share a secret that has intensified their ambition. Just as Johnston has promised his mother, before her death four months earlier, that he will win the FA Cup, so Matthews made the same pledge as his father lay dying eight years earlier. It is an oath he will keep private until shortly before his own death more than 50 years later.

Above dark blue socks topped by long orange turnovers, Blackpool might be wearing the most spacious shorts in Cup Final history – making them look more like circus clowns than professional sportsmen. But it is Bolton's shiny satin navy britches that catch the eye of the Duke as he makes his way down their line-up. "You all look like a bunch of pansies," is his appraisal, overheard by Banks.

Formalities over, Johnston has a moment of panic when he realises he has forgotten to take out the dental plate containing his two false teeth. Usually he slips it into the pocket of his suit jacket, but now he has to dash to the touchline, where Blackpool's 12th man,<sup>2</sup> Johnny Crosland, is the lucky recipient of the captain's choppers. Johnston trots back to the centre circle, shakes hands with opposite number Willie Moir, wins the toss and elects to kick off. The teams swap ends so that Bolton have their backs to the tunnel and Blackpool's inside-right, Ernie Taylor, kneels to give his bootlace one last tie before kick-off. As he makes to rise, he hears the voice of the match official hissing at him.

"Ernie, undo it and do it up again, would you?" urges Griffiths. "I can't start the game until bang on three o'clock and we're a minute early."

Once the game has made its punctual start, Taylor sets off on an attempted foray into the Bolton half. Lacking in real intent, it is more of a boxer's range-finding jab than anything else, but he does beat one white shirt before losing control and allowing Lofthouse to play the ball safely to Banks. A pass forward to Harold Hassall results in Blackpool regaining possession just inside Bolton territory and Stan Mortensen advances, head down as though deep in concentration, before delivering to the right wing to offer Matthews his first touch.

Matthews gives the crowd little time to anticipate any trickery. Instead, he quickly controls and crosses without taking on his opponent, only for the ball to be headed behind by Bolton's Eric Bell. His corner fares no better, cleared to the edge of the box where Jackie Mudie's efforts to create some space are closed down.

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2 Substitutes were not introduced in English football until 1965, but teams did habitually nominate an official 12th man in case of a late emergency.

Now Bolton launch their first attack, Lofthouse spreading the ball to the right and seeing it ricochet off the back of a team-mate. A further Bolton attempt to get across the halfway line goes only as far as an orange shirt before outside-right Doug Holden finally advances the ball and then sets off down the right wing in anticipation of a return pass. It takes Moir, his inside-forward, two attempts to get the ball back to Holden, who pulls it back across the face of the Blackpool box. Moir misses it completely and Hassall's failure to control cleanly gives him no option but to return the ball to the winger. This time Holden lays it gently first time to his left, where Lofthouse is waiting with a massive swing of his right leg.

"I think the shot took everyone by surprise," he explains later, noting his fear that Moir might have been caught offside if he had attempted to pass the ball into the box. He even apologises to Johnston. "There wasn't much else I could do, Harry. So I shot."

The ball barely rises above shin height but bounces in front of George Farm as he dives to his right, slipping through the Blackpool keeper's arms and into the net. "What seemed to be the sound of thunder swept down from the terraces alive with blue and white," according to Matthews.

"No one was more surprised than me when it went in," Lofthouse admits subsequently. "I didn't hit the shot properly and it must have bounced three times before it got to Farm. But George made a complete mess of it. Whether he dived too early or took his eye off the ball I don't know. But it hit him on the shoulder and bounced into the net."

Fewer than 80 seconds have been played.

Reminding viewers that he used to be a goalkeeper, BBC TV commentator Kenneth Wolstenholme ventures that Farm should indeed have stopped the shot, but adds in mitigation: "This Wembley pitch is like no other. I walked on it this morning and it's a bit skiddy."

One writer, Ivan Sharpe of the *Sunday Chronicle*, had warned of such an occurrence a week earlier, noting that the law of averages indicated a likely individual blunder because there had been none in the final since Charlton's Bert Turner scored an own goal in 1946.

As Lofthouse accepts hugs and manly back-pats from his team-mates, Johnston turns towards his keeper and slaps his hands together in a mixture of admonishment and defiance, his disappointment clearly visible. In a second or two, though, he gathers himself, turning to all parts of the field with clenched fists and loud yells. He claps his hands in encouragement. "Let's get those heads up!"

This time, he vows, his Wembley outcome will be different.

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THE SLENDER, flinty figure of Harry Johnston had become as much a part of the Blackpool landscape over the previous two decades as the Tower itself. Eighteen years had passed since he first arrived at Bloomfield Road, during which time he had witnessed and played no small part in the elevation of the club into the elite level of English football. Like most footballers of his era, he looked older than his actual age; but that was down to his prematurely thinning hairline and the attritional effects of the war years and the austerity that followed – not to mention the styles of the day, which made little distinction between young adults and their ageing fathers. It certainly owed little to the stresses of his employment. Blackpool, as one would expect from a town specialising in the provision of fun, was mostly a happy football club.

Johnston had found his way there from his birthplace of Manchester, where he grew up as a United fan, even though his home in Moss Side was only a short walk from City's Maine Road ground. After leaving school, he worked

in a millinery firm, sorting out hats in the basement, while playing for Droylsden in the Manchester League. Early in 1935, a Blackpool director went to take a look at one of the team's strikers but was taken with the 15-year-old left-half, signing him for the club as an amateur. Johnston was less enamoured with his first look at the town, but was assured by his father: "Harry, if you don't make the grade as a footballer, son, you can always come in with me in the haulage business."

In the summer, he signed as a member of the Blackpool ground staff, earning £2 and ten shillings (£2.50) per week. Training as a footballer was something he got to do only after the completion of the daily chores foisted upon those of his lowly status. There were boots to be cleaned and polished, dressing rooms to be tidied and washed down, and terraces to be cleared of litter and debris after home matches. "A youngster has to take this sort of thing in his stride. It deflates his airy-fairy approach to the game," was his pragmatic view; one shared by just about every prospective professional of the time. Pre-war Britain was no place for rebellious youth, especially when the alternative was life in a factory, down a mine or on the dole. "Picking up bits of paper and cigarette-ends is one of the best things I know to cure the swelled head of some budding genius who thinks the whole football world should bow down and acclaim him as soon as he arrives on the ground," Johnston would write.

His first-team debut was made against local rivals Preston at Deepdale in November 1937, a few months after Blackpool had achieved promotion to the First Division in their second season under new manager Joe Smith. Other than through the intervention of war or injury, his place was secure for the best part of the next two decades.

Once Matthews had been signed in the early years after the war, it was the superstar winger who became the public face of the Blackpool team; his fancy footwork and

personification of English sportsmanship and good humour having crowds queuing up and down the country for a chance to see the Seasiders in action. Yet, in many ways, it was Johnston who best characterised the style of football that managed to earn Blackpool a vast numbers of friends, as well as a more than satisfactory amount of victories, in the ten years following the hostilities in Europe.

Composed and quietly determined, he favoured the thoughtful pass over the bludgeoning boot when it came to advancing play from deep positions. In his autobiography, written in the mid-1950s, he condemned teams who thumped the ball forward in the hope that a lumbering centre-forward would win a knockdown for a team-mate, describing it as “spiv soccer”. As someone who spent most of his career at wing-half, inter-play with the inside-forwards was, he believed, the key to attractive football and the method that ensured wide men such as Matthews were brought into the game as frequently and effectively as possible. While regular left-half Hugh Kelly would adopt a more defensive function, Johnston took a greater attacking role, launching his forwards at the opposition whenever possible. He did so with such effect that *Charles Buchan’s Football Monthly* described him as “one of the greatest attacking wing-halves ever”.

Long, direct passes were employed only as a method of putting forwards Stan Mortensen or Allan Brown in the clear against unsuspecting defences. “We in the Blackpool team set out to try to play pure football,” Johnston explained, arguing that their best results were achieved by “a mixture of the long and short passing game”.

After moving to centre-half for the latter stages of his career, Johnston admitted to feeling “shackled” and missed the attacking involvement that his preferred position afforded him. “I used to play hard,” was his own assessment of his game to author Robin Daniels in the 1972 book *Blackpool Football*. “I used to tackle hard. I used to try to

play good constructive football when I was in possession. But I never played dirty.”

Even in the number five shirt he was more than a mere stopper, ensuring that those flanking him in the half-back line reflected his philosophy on how the game should be played. Bill Holden, the Burnley centre-forward, was one of many players who cited Johnston as his toughest opponent, noting his “ability to anticipate a move in advance” and his “good distribution of the ball”.

Blackpool’s position within the English football hierarchy and consciousness had changed considerably due to the war. From being an unregarded team that had spent only three years in the top flight of English football before winning another promotion to the First Division in 1937, they became the glamour side of the sport’s makeshift, regionally-based structure between 1939 and 1945. In the club’s favour was its seaside location, which offered plenty of accommodation and made it an ideal home for the Royal Air Force’s wartime training base. Among the many buildings requisitioned was Bloomfield Road, which was used as military offices – providing the club with a windfall that enabled them to clear their £33,000 debt. Their own team office shifted, meanwhile, to an accountant’s office in Birley Street. Colonel William Parkinson, the club secretary, acted as liaison with the RAF – a relationship that helped Blackpool make the most of the football talent it suddenly found on its doorstep.

The nature of wartime football was that clubs were able to take advantage of players based locally. It meant that military men unable to get the leave required to return to their home clubs were frequently available to turn out in tangerine instead.

While some teams were unable to name their sides until they saw which players were able to make it to the ground for kick-off, Blackpool were frequently in the position of having more men to select from than they

had open slots. The football authorities, meanwhile, were understandingly indulgent when it came to the formalities of acquiring permission from clubs who owned those players' registrations.

It meant that men such as Matthews of Stoke, Ronnie Dix of Tottenham and William Burbanks, an FA Cup Final goalscorer for Sunderland, regularly featured in the Blackpool forward line. Spearheading the attack was Jock Dodds, who had joined the club from Sheffield United in March 1939 and, according to Johnston, "moved like a ballet dancer despite his bulk". He would score more than 200 goals during his wartime posting as an RAF physical training instructor before moving via Shamrock Rovers to Everton when League football returned. By that time he had helped Blackpool become a dominant force, going unbeaten at home for two years and winning the northern regional league three years in succession. As is the English way, even in times when the country was unified as never before, success bred some resentment, with Blackpool attracting censure for borrowing players in order to boost ticket sales. They were even criticised on one occasion for using a coach to get to a game in Manchester, although they had also had to withdraw from cup competition one year because of a ban on servicemen travelling.

In 1943, Blackpool won the War Cup North and came from two goals down to beat southern victors Arsenal 4-2 at Stamford Bridge in a game billed as the "Championship of England". Skippering the side that day was Johnston, who had become a corporal physical training instructor and would be posted to Kasfareet in Egypt the following year.

Aged 26 when the war ended and married with a son, Johnston was more fortunate than many pre-war footballers in that he still had the prime years of his career ahead of him. Few in the football world, however, felt the same could be said of Blackpool. They were generally



expected to slip back into the sport's other ranks once they were denied the personnel advantages they had enjoyed for six years. Yet the permanent signing of Matthews – who had already settled in Blackpool – for £11,500 in 1947 helped change the perception many had of a supposedly friendly, non-threatening club.

They breezed through the early rounds of the 1947/48 FA Cup, beating Leeds, Chester, Colchester, the season's giant-killers, and Fulham without conceding a goal. In the semi-final, a Stan Mortensen hat-trick saw off Tottenham, taking the club to their first Wembley final. Their opponents were a Manchester United side led by young Scottish manager Matt Busby, a three-time Cup Finalist as a player with Manchester City and part of the generation whose careers had been sawn in half by Hitler.

The Seasiders took the lead when Eddie Shimwell converted a penalty following a foul on Mortensen, becoming the first full-back to score in a Wembley final, but a defensive mix-up allowed United to equalise through the prolific Jack Rowley. Mortensen scored by shooting home on the turn and Blackpool entered the final 20 minutes with the advantage, only for Rowley to equalise after a free-kick. United's pressure proved too much for Blackpool, goals by Stan Pearson and John Anderson inside the final ten minutes giving them a 4-2 victory. Johnston demonstrated the tactical simplicity of the age by putting much of United's success down to goalkeeper Jack Crompton being instructed to direct his clearances away from Matthews's side of the field. "It is the sort of deep thought Matt puts into the game," he said of United's manager.

Less risible were Johnston's painful recollections of the maelstrom in which the losing Cup Final team feels trapped once the last whistle has sounded. "It is very lonely standing below the Royal Box at Wembley at the head of a defeated team. They have given their best, and

in the heat and excitement of the game, they have had no time to think about what will happen after the match. Once the final whistle has blown, the handshakes with the victors follow. It's all goodwill and backslaps – then the reaction! You watch the winning skipper lead the way up to the Royal Box, while the losers stand sheepishly around awaiting their turn." Then, Johnston concluded, "the losers shamble off".

It was a torture that he would have to endure again three years later. And then it was even more painful. At least in 1948, Blackpool had the quaint – but in those days apparently genuine – consolation of having played a full part in a great game against a great team. In 1951, having been challengers for the League championship, they were expected to do better against a Newcastle side that had been struggling for form since reaching the final. Blackpool played poorly and deserved to lose, making it a miserable end to a season in which Johnston had been named Footballer of the Year.

Johnston felt, with hindsight, that "we lost the Cup at Huddersfield several weeks before the great day", referring to a knee injury suffered by forward Allan Brown. The constant – if unsophisticated compared to current times – attention of trainer John Lynas was unable to provide a remedy and Blackpool lined up with an amateur, Bill Slater, at inside-forward. Johnston and Joe Smith felt that using the offside trap to contain Newcastle and England centre-forward Jackie Milburn was the key to their chances as they doubted that the opposition defence could contain the skill of their attack.

Without playing particularly well, Blackpool were holding their own in an even game when Matthews worked some of his magic, beating defenders and clipping the ball towards Mortensen, who had advanced into a threatening position. A perfect delivery could have set up a goal, but the ball went astray by a few inches, allowing Ted Robledo to

clear to his brother George. The older of the Chilean-born siblings pushed the ball through for Milburn, the speed of Newcastle's switch from defence to attack preventing the Blackpool defence executing their offside tactics. Milburn tore clear and beat Farm to give Newcastle the lead. He doubled the advantage after a couple of feints and a back-heel created the opportunity to fire in from the edge of the penalty area. The Cup was heading to Newcastle, where it would remain the next year after victory over Arsenal.

Returning home, Johnston found himself once more addressing disappointed Blackpool fans outside the Town Hall, promising them that the Cup was destined eventually to find its way to their stretch of coastline. He might have been speaking more in hope than expectation, but in Johnston the club had a reliable figure as its captain; composed and credible, a good head for a crisis. He had shown his patience after winning his first England cap in an 8-2 victory against Holland in 1946. With opportunities limited by the presence of Wolverhampton Wanderers' Billy Wright, he'd played only twice more by the time of the 1953 final – on his way to an eventual career tally of ten international appearances. He said of his calm personality: "It's not something I've tried to cultivate. It's something I was born with," and stressed its importance to the performance of his duties. "You can't be a manager or a leader or a captain if you are continually losing your temper," he said.

He had become captain of a side that included many older players, whose respect, he felt, he could earn more effectively through example than through shouting and yelling. "I used to say: 'Look, I'm doing this; running about, struggling like hell to help. You can do it, and you will do it.'"

It was an approach that worked, according to teammate Eddie Shimwell. "The captain has got to be a consistently good player, which Harry was," he said. "He

was a very nice chap, on the field and off the field. He was a hard driver. But he was always driving himself as well.”

Bill Perry said: “Harry was a very good skipper, forceful but very fair. He played hard and expected everyone else to do the same thing. Harry led by example.”

Cyril Robinson, the youngest member of Blackpool’s 1953 Wembley line-up and another member of the half-back line, recalled: “Harry was a good footballer and a good captain and he used that position. He would shout to you: ‘Come back, quick, watch him.’ He had played wing-half and when he wasn’t so quick he went centre-half and was as good there. He could head a ball and he could kick with two feet. I always tried to copy Harry because he was good in the air and he was a good passer of the ball. I always thought I would like to be a similar player to him.”

Unlike the modern day, captaincy of a football club in the Johnston era involved a lot more than tossing the coin and placing an elasticated armband on one’s sleeve. Many teams still acted more like their cricketing counterparts, with the captain directing tactics on the field. At Blackpool, Smith happily ceded such responsibility to his captain, who was thereby able to ensure that his team employed his own preferred method of thoughtful, creative attack. Besides, Johnston had little trouble anticipating Smith’s own desires. It was the captain’s duty to maintain a close working relationship with his manager and Johnston took the opportunity to get to know Smith better by driving him to work. Smith would walk down Palantine Road and wait at the bus stop at around quarter to ten, in time to catch the bus that would deposit him at Bloomfield Road for training. Most mornings, Johnston would be leaving the newsagent shop he had bought, having supervised delivery of the morning papers, and would offer his boss a lift. Their conversation would contain “nothing serious” but was important in forging a closer bond between the men.

Johnston identified strong personal relationships throughout the team as an important part of its success. As captain, he sometimes felt a little removed from the banter and bonding, torn between being unofficial assistant manager and one of the lads. But he also understood how vital it was for him to know the different personalities inside the jerseys, noting: "One man you can really get into and rollock, whereas with another player you've got to get at him in a different way altogether. You pat him on the back and say: 'Well, come on. You can do better than this.'"

In the days before players had agents to represent their interests, the captain also had to tread a delicate path between the changing room and the manager's office. Former Blackburn Rovers and England captain Ronnie Clayton, who made his League debut in 1950, recalled: "If any of the lads were unhappy or had a bit of an argument about money, then they came to me and had a bit of a word. Then I would try and do something."

Likewise, it was Johnston who would accompany aggrieved Blackpool players on their visits to see Smith, although he applied his own judgement first, withholding his support if he felt they were in the wrong or putting ego ahead of the team. "If I felt a player was right, and that he had a rightful grumble, I would support him all the way," he explained.

Johnston was certainly no revolutionary when it came to the issue of wages. In his autobiography he wrote far more passionately about the need for footballers to equip themselves with an alternate trade and to arm themselves for life beyond the game than he did about the question of whether they were being rewarded enough in the post-war attendance boom that saw money pouring into clubs' coffers. And he remained an advocate for a uniform ceiling on players' salaries, which at the time of the 1953 FA Cup Final was £12 per week. "If there had been no maximum

wage in my playing days and one man was getting £40 a week and one was getting £80, there would have been a right shemozzle among some players because they were both in the same team.”

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IT IS that all-for-one spirit, coupled with the adherence to constructive football, that Johnston is looking for as Blackpool set about recovering from falling behind inside two minutes against Bolton. “I don’t have to tell the lads what to do,” he tells himself. “They know there is only one answer to a blow like this. There’s no use in banging the ball hopefully upfield.”

Their first attempt to clear the deficit ends after Bill Perry chips an aimless ball forward from his left-wing position when he has time for greater thought. In the common style of the era, although somewhat contradictory to Johnston’s preferences, right-back Shimwell drives his boot through the ball to launch the first of a series of downfield hoofs. “Full-backs gave it the old boot mostly,” according to Robinson. “They never helped the wing-halves with the way they played. They would kick it long a lot. Then they thought they had done their job.”

Malcolm Barrass recalled the approach of Bolton’s defenders being no different. “When we got the ball it was ‘bang’ down to the other end of the field. We got the ball forward to Nat and he held it up.”

This time Shimwell’s long ball is punched clear by Stan Hanson, who has been performing such acts in Bolton’s goal for the past 17 years. Then Perry again finds himself in a position to attempt a foray into the area, but is outnumbered on this occasion.

After a few more aimless punts up and down the field, a header by Blackpool left-back Tommy Garrett falls at the feet of Bolton winger Holden, who combines

with Lofthouse and Moir before finding the ball being clipped back to him further down the line. Twice he fails to get past Garrett on the edge of the box and when Blackpool work the ball away towards the halfway line, Wolstenholme can barely contain his laughter in declaring excitedly: "Matthews in the inside-left position. Good gracious."

These are days long before the idea of giving anyone a free role is considered prudent. Wingers rarely venture in from the touchline without the ball already at their feet, although Matthews's status and skill make him one of the few able to get away with it. Without a full-back to shimmy past on this occasion, he drives the ball optimistically into no man's land and sees it run into Bolton's area. "Stanley's obviously decided that to win his Cup winner's medal at the third attempt he has got to wander and roam," says the reverential commentator, ignoring the wastefulness of his pass.

Wing-half and inside-right, Ewan Fenton and Ernie Taylor, combine through the middle to give Jackie Mudie the ball on the edge of the Bolton box, but he is unable to beat the attentions of Johnny Wheeler. Then Matthews and Perry try to burrow their way into dangerous territory from their respective positions on the flanks and, at last, Mudie manages to deliver low into the penalty area. Barrass has ample time to usher the ball away.

Five minutes have been played when Robinson commits the first foul of the game on Holden on the right corner of the Blackpool area. Wheeler's misdirected free-kick is typical of the ungainly play thus far, as is keeper Farm's decision to flap the ball over the bar when it drifts innocuously towards him. Langton swings Bolton's first corner in the direction of the penalty spot, where Hassall heads on and Blackpool clear. "We were excited from the word go," Barrass remembered. "We chased the ball everywhere."

## *Captain, My Captain*

In explaining the mistakes being made on the field, Wolstenholme describes the swirling wind in the stadium and notes the lushness of the pitch in contrast to the muddy or dry, bumpy pitches the players have been playing on in League games. No sooner have the words travelled the short distance from mouth to microphone than a wild clearance from Garrett hits Holden, who is able to advance into the box. Instead of bearing down on goal he pulls the ball back and Lofthouse has to dig it out from under his feet in order to deliver a shot that drifts harmlessly over the bar.

Seven and a half minutes have been played, and the 1953 FA Cup Final shows little sign of going down in history.