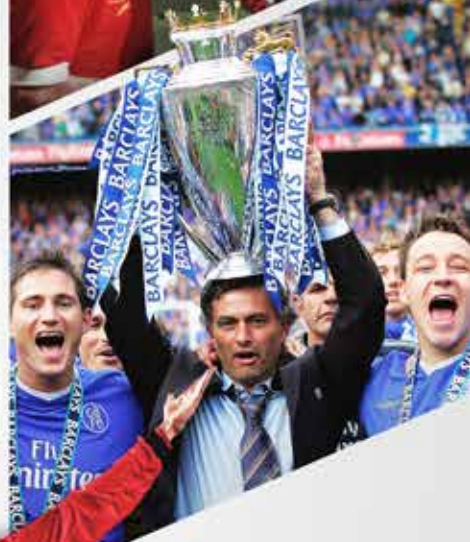
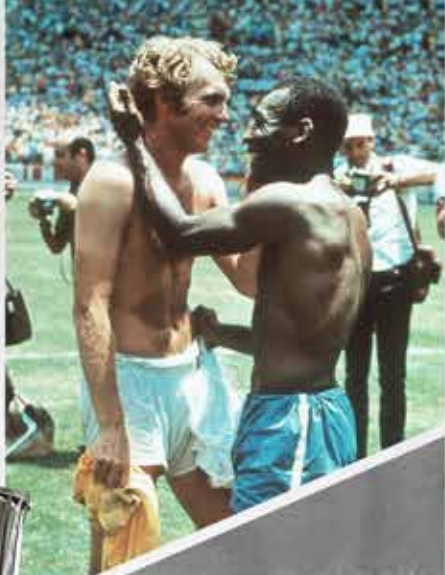


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Double Diamond

100 Years of Umbro

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Introduction

The footballing world that Umbro entered 100 years ago is unrecognisable from that of today. There was no World Cup, European Championship or European Cup, although the pioneering Copa América had begun in 1916. Many leading nations including Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Brazil, and Argentina were yet to establish a professional league. While players in the English and Scottish men's leagues were paid, a maximum wage was in place until 1961, meaning that they earned little more than other manual workers. They fared better than English female players, who were then three years into what would be a 50-year ban.

Several prominent clubs including Fiorentina, Napoli, AS Roma, Paris Saint-Germain, Olympique Lyonnais, I. FC Köln and Dynamo Kyiv did not exist, and the national sides of the Republic of Ireland, Colombia, Greece, South Africa, and Peru were all yet to play their first match.

John Logie Baird would not demonstrate the first television until 1927, also the year that the first football match was broadcast on radio. Therefore, the only way to watch live football was at the stadium. There were no substitutions and no red or yellow cards, with most English sides adopting an adventurous 2-3-5 formation.

Umbro's first kits were typical of the time, being heavy, plain cotton jerseys and shorts. There was little to mark them out as sportswear – no names or numbers, no sponsors and very few teams even sported their crest. There were no agreements between clubs and manufacturers, with teams procuring their kits through local sports stores. Teams still changed colours regularly, with Brazil not to feature in their traditional yellow and green for another quarter of a century.

The 1934 FA Cup Final, where winners Manchester City and their opponents Portsmouth both wore Umbro-branded kit with 'Tangeru' fabric, served as the company's debut on the footballing stage. In the 90 years since, the history of Umbro has been intertwined with the evolution of football and the sportswear industry.

Many of the defining moments of the modern game involved players in Umbro kit and latterly boots, even though for the first half-century of its existence there was no external branding to mark this. Pelé, Beckenbauer, Best, Charlton, Cruyff, Dalglish, Gullit, Ronaldo, Marta, and Neymar are just some of the footballing greats to have sported the company's kit in professional games. European Cup-winning clubs Real Madrid (1966), Celtic (1967), Manchester United (1968 and 1999), Liverpool (1977, 1978, 1981 and 1984), and Ajax (1995), and World Cup-winning sides Brazil (1962, 1966, 1970 and 1994) and England (1966) claimed the world's biggest club and national team prizes while wearing Umbro.

Through marketing and technical innovations, Umbro have also been a key player in the growth of the multi-billion-pound sportswear market. Having invented the replica football kit in 1955, the company went on to lead the explosion in branded merchandise (known as licensed sportswear in the US) which emerged in the 1990s. Innovations such as the perforated 'Airtex' shirt in the 1960s, the sweat-wicking 'Vapatech' fabric of the 1990s, and reversible shirts made for Manchester United and England in the early 2000s were all market-leading. Umbro also has the unique experience in being interwoven with the globe's two sportswear giants, serving for a quarter of a century as adidas's UK distributor from 1961 to 1985 before a period under Nike ownership from 2007 to 2012.



From Wilmslow to Wembley

It took Harold Charles Humphreys less than ten years to grow his sportswear firm from selling to pub regulars from a cupboard to manufacturing the kits worn by both teams at the 1934 FA Cup Final. This would signal their introduction to professional football, quickly becoming the dominant brand in the British game. Even by this early stage, Harold had established several traits that would define the company over the following nine decades. High-quality products, an eye for marketing and customer service, and a commitment to developing leaders from within would all become hallmarks of Umbro's business.

Harold was born on 31 January 1902 in Mobberley, Cheshire, to house painter James Humphreys and his second wife, 29-year-old Minnie Anne Steele. While his company became a key part of football, and Harold himself was a keen Manchester City fan, his first sporting love was golf. He was a talented golfer, later becoming captain at the Alderley Edge and Prestbury golf clubs, twice winning the Cheshire Championship, and playing off scratch into his mid-60s. However, the professional game was still in its infancy and did not offer a reliable source of income.

Having left school at 13, Harold spent nine years in the clothing trade in a variety of roles. Unbeknown to him, this experience would prove a solid apprenticeship for his future venture. He began work at a textile firm in Manchester, with his first task being to dust 14 storeys of staircase banister. He also worked in two other firms in the cotton trade as well as in haberdashery, before joining established sportswear manufacturer Messrs Bucks (later Bukta). Together they gave him exposure to different aspects of the clothing trade, from cutting fabric for gloves to selling sewing supplies.

Harold's experiences of employment also gave him a clear vision of his future, and the drive to make it happen. The UK suffered a pronounced recession after the First World War, with economic output decreasing by 25 per cent. This impacted personally on Harold who spent a solitary week unemployed, later saying, 'It made such a lasting impression on me that I determined never ever to be out of work again.' At Messrs Bucks, established in 1879 and then a firm of around 100 people, the

uncertain economic situation saw Harold and his fellow employees forced to take a pay cut. He joined initially in a warehouse role but was soon promoted to take on responsibilities as a travelling salesman. Despite this promotion, the ambitious young Harold quickly became disillusioned with life as an employee, as he later described, 'I couldn't see any chance of the advancement I wanted for myself. I was terribly keen on success, so I started a small retail business.'

Harold initially began by buying sportswear in Manchester and reselling it to regulars at the Bull's Head pub in Mobberley which his parents had taken over. This relieved the local customers of the inconvenience and expense of travelling to the city. To do this, at just 18 Harold founded the eponymous Humphreys Bros Clothing firm in 1920 along with his elder brother Wallace, who soon left the company after moving to Leicester. Their mother had provided them with a capital stake of £5, and allowed them to operate out of a small cupboard in the pub. Fed by a postwar sporting boom, the demand for sports equipment and clothing increased rapidly such that in 1924 Harold decided to start producing his own wares. He began to work full-time, recruiting James Ogden Taylor to work alongside him, and the 'premises' were extended to include Harold's bedroom.

The cashflow requirements of the growing business meant that investment was needed, and on 23 May 1924 Harold registered Humphreys Bros Limited as a company. The 'Umbro' brand, a contraction of the firm's name (hUMphreys BROthers), emerged shortly after its foundation. The (then-single) diamond shape was used in the company's first logo, surrounding the brand name written in a Gothic script within speech marks. Harold, named chairman and still only 22, James as director and secretary, and the father of Harold's wife Myra invested £25 each (equivalent to around £2,000 today), with local firm Williams Deacon's Bank providing a £50 loan. Harold later praised the key role of the bank's early support, 'I was treated like a Lord at Williams Deacon's at the age of 17 or 18 and it's still the same ... never once have they let us down.' One of the bank's managers, a Mr Cunningham, would go on to be one of the company's early personal investors.

Harold Humphreys at work in his office at Umbro in 1949. Humphreys founded Humphreys Bros Limited (later Umbro) in 1924 at the age of just 22 with his brother Wallace.

The developing business had soon outgrown the pub backroom, moving into premises on Green Lane in the centre of Wilmslow. This introduced another key early supporter of the company, landlady Helen Jaffrey, who leased the building to Harold at a cut-price annual rent of £250. She would also become an early shareholder alongside her husband, with Harold acknowledging her contributions, 'She was as good as gold. I don't know why there are people like that. Nothing was ever too much for her, she put in central heating at one time and barely charged us for it and if we wanted a little more space we'd only to ask until we were filling all her premises.' Despite Mrs Jaffrey's generosity, the limitations of the 18 sq ft former washhouse became apparent as the company swiftly progressed from outsourcing small-batch production to employing its own machinists. Initially, production relied on two primitive sewing machines and a slot knife to cut fabric. By 1926, there were six machinists left shivering in the unheated building, being reduced to burning scraps of rubber left over from production for warmth despite the resulting acrid smell.

Among those employed at Green Lane were two early examples of Umbro's ability to retain staff, and to offer a route from entry-level roles to the highest levels of management. One of the group was Lilian Eyres, who had earlier been contracted as Umbro's first outworker sewing shorts while holding down a full-time job at a nearby shirt factory. She joined the company aged 22 on 13 April 1926 alongside her sister Phyllis Kent, and incredibly only retired in 1980 after 54 years' service (her sister having completed an impressive 45 years). Having joined the firm as its first employee aged just 14, Alan Bradbury would go on to serve Umbro for more than quarter of a century, becoming head of the cutting department at just 25.

In addition to opportunities for advancement, the company invested in social activities to motivate and retain staff. In July 1928 the board approved a £3 contribution to the workers' summer trip. Lilian later recalled Harold leading annual trips for employees and their families to the Blackpool Illuminations. Such was the size of the party that children were given identification labels to wear around their neck in case they got lost. This, together with the company's investment in delivering high-quality goods swiftly, imbued the employees with commitment beyond their paid responsibilities. When demand increased, workers would often turn back the hands of the factory clock to give them more time to complete the order. Appropriately, for the company's 25th anniversary in 1949 every employee contributed to a clock as a gift to Harold which was hung above the factory door.

The sparse production facilities at Green Lane were matched by the firm's limited capacity for transporting goods. At first, Harold was forced to lug heavy suitcases full of samples around Cheshire and Lancashire by train. At the end of the working day, goods would be rushed to the station by bicycle for delivery. Occasionally, a handcart pulled by a character called 'Whistling Harry' would be recruited to carry them, although this arrangement ended badly as he crashed into a parked car on his final journey for the firm causing £5 of damage. The company invested in a motorcycle in its first year of business, allowing them to expand their sales territory south as Harold rode into Staffordshire and Shropshire.

A further upgrade to an Austin Seven car in 1925 allowed Umbro to introduce a 48-hour dispatch service which Harold saw as a breakthrough in the company's growth. 'It was a risk,' he later said, 'but it put us on the



The Bull's Head pub in Mobberley, Cheshire, where Harold and Wallace Humphreys founded Umbro, initially operating out of a small cupboard.

map because people had been so disappointed with late deliveries. We often got the order in the morning and had to make it the same day! Having met their £2,000 sales target in their first year of trading, turnover increased rapidly to £5,000 and £8,000 in the following

24 months. This led Umbro to employ a Mr Blee as sales representative for London and the south, while the firm also made its first international sales. The following year, its domestic territory had expanded as far as Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the east coast.



King George V being introduced to the Manchester City team before the 1934 FA Cup Final at Wembley, at which both winners City and opponents Portsmouth wore Umbro kit.

Umbro's growing customer base soon necessitated an upgrade to much larger premises. In 1930 the growing firm moved around the corner to the 10,000 sq ft Umbro Works on Water Lane which would be their main base for over half a century. In the initial years, the site was developed to incorporate a canteen, office, and warehousing space. The move meant leaving Mrs Jaffery's premises, and Harold was terrified of telling her about the prospective move. Her response was typically positive, 'Well, of course I've been expecting it ... You must move for the good of the firm.' She also made an important contribution as a shareholder, warning the board against the prospect of a proposed takeover bid at an annual meeting.

While Umbro would soon become primarily associated with football, at this point they were a true multisport brand. The company offered a wide range of products, from running shorts and cub/scout uniforms, to rowing vests, umpire coats and tennis racquet head covers. Even within the football range, the 1933 catalogue lists a bewildering array of styles available which catered to different budgets. In the absence of discriminators such as distinctive design elements or club contracts, Umbro had to appeal to customers on the basis of cost and quality. The cheapest 'Nipper' promised 'sound British quality, suitable for junior clubs' at a cost of 21 shillings per dozen shirts (equivalent to about £8 per shirt today). At the other end of the range, the 'Finalist' offered 'insuperable British quality, heaviest possible tested yarns, reinforced to withstand roughest treatment' for a mere 97 shillings (around £37/shirt today).

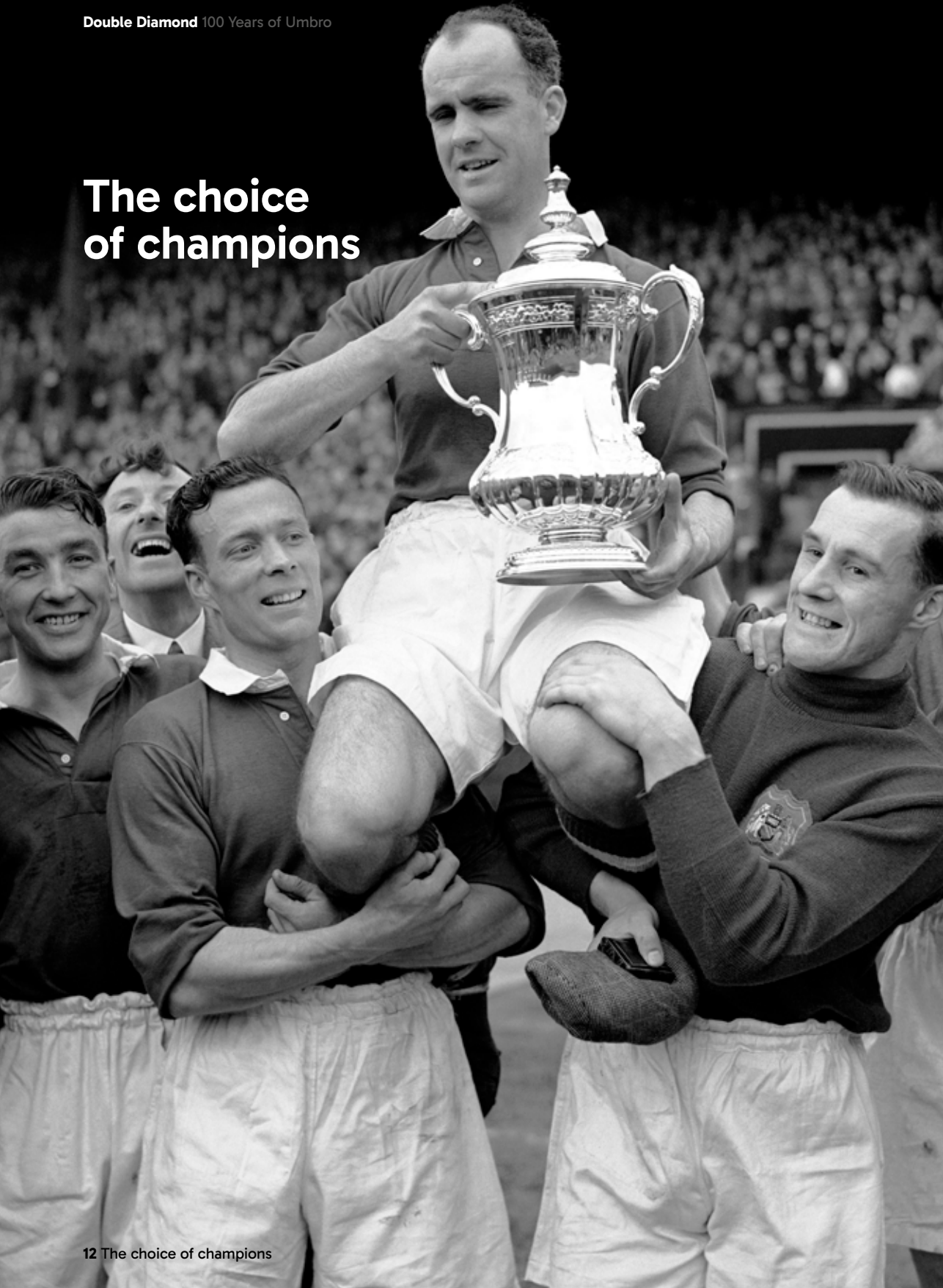
Similarly, shorts varied from 'Laddie' (11s 6d per dozen; 'Fleecy lined. Full cut.') to the dramatically named 'Ironclad' (41s per dozen; 'Guaranteed untearable. Drill. Fleecy lined.'), with socks, known as hose, varying from 12s 9d to 80s for a set. Jerseys were also offered in a variety of designs, including plain (21s per dozen 'Nipper' jerseys), stripes, quarters, 'Aston Villa' with different coloured sleeves and a small yoke around the neck, a 'Manchester United' chevron design, and a 'Bradford City' design (the most expensive at 25s 6d per dozen) with a yoke around the shoulders. All of these designs were offered in a variety of colourways using 'dyes of outstanding quality, brilliant and fast'.

The 1934 FA Cup Final served as Umbro's debut in first-class football, with both sides wearing the firm's

kit. Although shirt numbers had been worn officially by Manchester City and their opponents Everton in the previous year's final, they were not used this time. Therefore, in the absence of product branding the only features on the collared jerseys were Portsmouth's star and crescent emblem and the city of Manchester's shield. The game offered an early example of Umbro's product sub-branding and performance-focused design. Both teams debuted garments made from 'Tangeru' fabric, which Umbro confidently predicted would 'revolutionise the trade within a few seasons'. It was made from exotic-sounding Peruvian pima cotton, which was light, quick drying and helped to wick moisture away from the skin. The players also enjoyed the comfort of a 'Fricshunfree' velvet insert in their shorts. This would be a step forward in the company's marketing, which to date had consisted of bland platitudes such as 'garments of distinction', and 'we promise service and guarantee satisfaction'. More importantly, the endorsement of professional sides – who received no payment and purchased their kits from local sports shops rather than the company themselves – was a free, high-profile form of advertising which Umbro subsequently exploited.

Manchester City were an obvious partner for Umbro, especially given the chairman's fondness for the team. This match saw the start of a long relationship between the Wilmslow firm and their local side, who would wear the company's kit until 1997. That south coast side Portsmouth also sported Umbro 'jersey, knickers, and hose' was a testament to the company's growing network. The match featured figures who would appear later in key moments in the company's story. One member of the winning line-up was 24-year-old Scottish international defender Matt Busby, later to become Manchester United manager. This would also be referee Stanley Rous's last match before becoming secretary of the FA and later president of FIFA. Twenty-five days short of a decade since Harold registered the company, King George V presented the cup to City's captain Sam Cowan who was dressed head-to-toe in Umbro. This was the first of 42 consecutive FA Cup finals until 1982, interrupted only by suspension of the competition from 1939 to 1945 during the Second World War; at which at least one side would participate wearing the company's kit. Umbro had found their sporting niche, and would rapidly become the dominant brand in British football.

The choice of champions



Only 20 years after Umbro's Wembley debut, the company effectively completed its quest for domestic dominance. At club level it had supplied every major English and Scottish side, and won every domestic trophy multiple times. When England finally donned Umbro kit in 1954, this completed a clean sweep of the five British and Irish international sides. All of this was achieved despite a Second World War which ravaged the economy and saw professional football competitions suspended for six years.

Manchester City's FA Cup success was immediately followed by that of Sheffield Wednesday in 1935, with they and fellow finalists West Bromwich Albion both clad in Umbro gear. City added the company's first league title in 1937 alongside Sunderland's FA Cup win, with Celtic's Scottish Cup triumph the same year representing Umbro's first honour outside England. The Glasgow side helped Umbro complete a domestic clean sweep by winning the 1938 Scottish First Division. Further proof of their dominant position came in the final season before

a six-year break, which saw the company supply all four finalists in the 1939 English and Scottish cup finals.

The company were quick to take advantage of the unofficial endorsements of their products provided by top teams' use of Umbro kit. The front cover of the 1935 brochure, or 'Umbrochure', featured a photo of the two FA Cup finalists with 'The choice of both teams in the Wembley Final' emblazoned across it. The cover also showcased a new-look Umbro logo in which the letters of the company name were stretched vertically to fill the diamond shape. This would remain as the Umbro logo, with only minor modifications, for four decades. In the centre of the brochure, letters of endorsement from the finalists, semi-finalists Burnley, and previous winners Manchester City were included alongside photos of the occasions.

Interestingly, the double-page spread also featured Glasgow side Queen's Park. Winners of ten Scottish Cups between 1874 and 1893, they had only been promoted to the Scottish top flight in 1923 with



Manchester City's 1936/37 First Division-winning team. As with the FA Cup, Umbro's hometown side were the first to claim the trophy whilst wearing the company's kit.

Manchester United's captain Johnny Carey is held aloft by his team-mates after a 4-2 victory against Blackpool in the 1948 FA Cup Final. United's first major trophy in 37 years would be followed by five league titles, a further FA Cup victory and the 1968 European Cup title in the following two decades, all in Umbro kit.

fifth place their highest finish. Presumably they were included as a mark of Umbro's international reach rather than the club's recent achievements. The catalogue also featured the tagline 'The Choice of Champions', which would be used extensively across the following decades. City's league title was then highlighted on the cover of the 1937 catalogue, with Celtic's cup triumph also recorded on the inside. A series of photos of different teams in Umbro kit, and new and repeated written club testimonies, reinforced the company's marketing focus on professional endorsements.

Umbro's high-profile clients had helped to spark a huge period of growth for the company. In 1937 they opened a second factory, Lower Heys Mill in Macclesfield, whose 50 employees joined another 150 at Water Lane. However, this rapid expansion was halted in September 1939 with the start of the Second World War. The six-year conflict had a massive impact on every aspect of daily life, including the cessation of professional and most amateur football which saw demand for sporting goods plummet. To ensure the firm's survival, Harold repurposed production for war work, including uniforms and part of the interior of Lancaster Bombers. The works canteen also provided food for servicemen including the local RAF squadron, with 250,000 meals estimated to have been provided throughout the war. Through this support, Harold persuaded the Board of Trade not to close the factory entirely.

In addition to the economic peril faced by the company, a more acute threat emerged during the Manchester Blitz in late 1940. A 2,000lb bomb landed close to the Wilmslow factory, destroying a house owned by the company but fortunately not exploding. The occupants, a Mr and Mrs Mottram, escaped with minor injuries having been inside the house at the time, and as later reported by Harold Humphreys, 'One minute, the couple were sitting by the fire and the next, moonlight was streaming in through a massive hole in the wall.' The factory, as well as nearby houses, was evacuated although one resident refused police and civil defence staff personnel's entreaties

to leave; this was Harold's mother. It was not until he arrived at the scene that she agreed to do so. The bomb disposal team were not able to defuse it for two weeks, so Umbro staff were transported to the Macclesfield factory in order to continue uniform production.

1945 brought an end to the war and the resumption of regular amateur and professional football. The FA Cup, FA Amateur Cup, and Football League (in a regional format for the first season) were all held in 1945/46, with the league's three divisions and international ties resuming the following year. Harold had to marshal a traumatised workforce, particularly the dozen staff who had seen active service. Luckily, none were killed although some were injured. With his typical level of consideration, Harold also considered the less obvious effects of the conflict on them, 'After the war, our first thought was to get those chaps who had been in the Services ... rehabilitated. We sent them a questionnaire in about 1944 to see what they thought they would like to do [when they returned]'. One German prisoner of war, Hans Burg, was employed by Umbro after the conflict, later becoming the chief buyer.

One of Harold's first moves to boost staff morale was to reinstate the social activities which had created a family atmosphere at the firm. In February 1946, an Umbro Staff Social Club was set up with the first social evening hosted on Tuesday, 12 February in the canteen. Initially involving only the Wilmslow factory staff, word got round and by the end of the year every person across the Stockport and Macclesfield factories was also a subscription-paying member. The company matched these contributions allowing for fortnightly social evenings which alternated with Tuesday dance classes, and which soon needed a larger venue than the canteen. Trips to Blackpool and a fireworks display at Belle Vue saw the workers gather together at the weekend, and a works table tennis team defended the company's honour against the likes of the local Army Cadet Force. The other sites also joined the Christmas dance for the first time this year, which saw the staff return on buses at 2am.

These and other activities were detailed in another new creation, the *Humphreys Monthly Mag*, which was first published in November 1946. The magazine largely performed a social function, detailing marriages, retirements, illnesses and a smattering of jokes and anecdotes. Fancy dress socials, the regular 'Football Buster' competition, hikes, hotpot suppers, a summer camp and other events were reported. Details of the pension and life assurance schemes, as well as a hospital scheme (the NHS not being implemented until 1948) were also provided. Important updates were given on the workload and wellbeing of Susan, the Wilmslow factory cat who served a crucial function as a mouser. The publications paint a picture of a social, close-knit workforce, with several in-jokes clearly in play through the articles.

Umbro's rebirth would take place amid a challenging economic situation across much of the globe including the UK. The war had seen the national debt double to nearly two-and-a-half-times its GDP, and prioritisation of exports to serve the deficit meant an extension to rationing. In 1941, clothes rationing had been introduced allowing only one outfit per person per year except for growing adolescents. These restrictions ended in 1949, but there were still challenges in obtaining raw materials. In 1951, Harold sent a memo to Umbro's employees regarding this shortage. 'It is becoming increasingly difficult, almost impossible I should say, to obtain supplies of cotton and woollen material,' he wrote. 'How long this will go on for we do not know, but a cabinet minister told us a week ago, that it would go much worse.' Leading clubs including Manchester United and Portsmouth were reduced to asking supporters to donate their vouchers to help replace kit. Umbro continued a policy of splitting their limited supply among their customers, rather than generating more immediate profit by satisfying a smaller number of large orders. This, Harold believed, 'cemented our relationship with many customers'.

At this time, professional clubs and national associations would be supplied directly by independent sports shops with little or no contact with Umbro. It would be these retailers, often owned by ex-players, that developed long-term relationships with the high-profile teams. Until the 1980s, when chain stores began to dominate the market, Umbro's sales spent a lot of time cultivating these highly personal relationships. 'We weren't just a rep going in there, you'd like to think you were a bit more than that,' explained Colin Hay, who worked in sales for Umbro in the 1980s and 1990s. 'Deep friendships were built on the back of that. We've still got friends that were customers, who we still visit socially 40 years later.'

A good example of the trade is Jack Sharp, a Liverpoolian who had a long career with Everton around the turn of the century. The twice-capped England international opened an eponymous sports store in the city during his playing career, and 20 years ahead of Umbro's Wembley debut it supplied both winners Burnley and their opponents Liverpool for the 1914 FA Cup Final. The retailer went on to outfit both Liverpool teams as well as other leading north-west sides for several decades, with Umbro among the brands they stocked. Sharp joined the Everton board in 1920, and the shop was a key city landmark until its takeover by JJB in 1988. Retailers would commonly replace the manufacturer's label, particularly in kits worn by professional sides, such that in the absence of external branding there was nothing to link it to its maker.

In addition to the lack of branding, there had been relatively little innovation in the football shirt in Umbro's first 25 years of operation. At the start of the 1950s, the heavy cotton jerseys they supplied to leading teams were almost indistinguishable from those offered at the company's birth. Conservatism dominated all aspects of design, with shirt numbers only being formally introduced in the Football League 11 years after their first appearance on Arsenal and Chelsea shirts in the 1928/29 season. It was the development



Wolverhampton Wanderers captain Billy Wright, wearing a reflective rayon Umbro jersey, leads his team out alongside his counterpart Ferenc Puskás from Hungarian side Honvéd for a friendly in December 1954. The match, which led indirectly to the formation of the European Cup, was played under floodlights and broadcast live on BBC TV.

of floodlights, thanks to the reliability in supply offered by the introduction of the National Grid in 1938, that catalysed a short-lived kit evolution at the start of the 1950s.

Until this point, football kits had been made out of natural fibres such as wool and predominantly cotton. The advent of synthetic fabrics such as rayon, nylon and polyester gave manufacturers access to materials with improved properties such as waterproofing, dye retention, and stain and shrinkage resistance. Rayon's reflective sheen led to teams including Manchester United and Wolverhampton Wanderers wearing the fabric during floodlit matches, although its lack of breathability led to it being phased out before the end of the decade. The high point was its appearance in the 1953 FA Cup Final, as Bolton Wanderers appeared in a dazzling white Umbro shirt although Sir Stanley Matthews ultimately led their opponents Blackpool to victory. The following season's catalogue also highlighted that Welsh referee Sandy Griffiths and his team had worn Umbro kit during the match.

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