

STEVEN SCRAGG



A TOURNAMENT  
**FROZEN  
IN TIME**

The Wonderful Randomness of the  
**European Cup Winners' Cup**



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## *Chapter One*

# 1980/81

THE 1980/81 edition of the European Cup Winners' Cup was just about as abstract as the tournament got. In a competition which offered the type of theatre that married football's A-list actors to jobbing extras when it came to the clubs involved, this was a season in which anything was possible. And yet the winners melted into the background as far as the wider history of the game was concerned, as did the runner-up.

Dinamo Tbilisi will mean nothing to an entire generation of football watchers, yet to my generation they will elicit an enigmatic smile and maybe even a moistening of the eye. It might sound strange to the uninitiated, but you'd be amazed just how many British football supporters go misty-eyed with joy at the memory of seeing their team of choice being knocked out of European competition by what would colloquially be referred to as a 'crack eastern European outfit'.

Of those great unknown sides to emerge from behind the Iron Curtain, Dinamo Tbilisi were one of the most clinical and unremitting. Fast and precise, they hit you on the break and they hit you hard. For those who saw them, they were unforgettable.

In the quarter-finals, at the beginning of March 1981, West Ham United were systematically dismantled by Dinamo Tbilisi at Upton Park.

Slicing straight through the West Ham midfield and defence time and time again, they enabled Aleksandre Chivadze, Vladimir Gutsaev and Ramaz Shengelia to score goals that were as beautiful as they were devastating. Ray Stewart, the West Ham right-back and penalty-taker extraordinaire was particularly tormented by the Dinamo Tbilisi offensive. He was caught in precarious possession of the ball for the second goal, when ludicrously left to man the West Ham defence all on his own.

What made the situation so ludicrous was that Stewart's team-mates had piled forward, as if chasing a last-minute equaliser, when instead, the first leg of the game was only 31 minutes old. Everything was still to play for. West Ham had fallen a goal behind a mere seven minutes earlier and even by the standards of March 1981 this was an admirably gung-ho approach from John Lyall and his players.

One botched corner, a lofted Dinamo Tbilisi clearance, an ill-advised header from Stewart and a flash of the white-shirted Gutsaev later, and the ball was once again in the back of Phil Parkes's net. It was as shocking as it was swift.

It wasn't as though Dinamo Tbilisi hadn't already sent advance word of their bewitching and ruthless blend of

football. They had taken the mighty Liverpool apart during the early exchanges of the previous season's European Cup; they had surgically unpicked the Liverpool of Ray Clemence, Alan Hansen, Graeme Souness and Kenny Dalglish with a performance which left you feeling the Georgians should have been wearing operating gowns, face masks and sterilised gloves.

They had even put five goals, without reply, past Waterford FC in the round prior to taking on West Ham. When it came to Dinamo Tbilisi, there shouldn't have been any shortage of easily accessible victim statements to draw research from.

West Ham's 1980/81 season might have been spent in the Second Division, a third successive campaign in which they had been playing second-tier football, but it was a far from insignificant West Ham vintage. Without a defeat at Upton Park for almost seven months, West Ham were running away with the Second Division title in style. They were ten days away from facing Liverpool at Wembley, in the League Cup Final. And while they had been knocked out of the FA Cup in the third round after a trilogy of games against Wrexham, they were still technically the holders of the FA Cup.

Along with Stewart and Parkes, the latter at one stage the most expensive goalkeeper in the world, West Ham could boast the services of talents such as Trevor Brooking, Billy Bonds, Alan Devonshire, Frank Lampard senior and Alvin Martin. They had a team which was the envy of many First Division clubs.

Dinamo Tbilisi dispensed with the 1980/81 West Ham with almost obscene ease. There was a wonderful sense of

spectacular misadventure to the east London side's Cup Winners' Cup run that season.

Before their hypnotic bemusement at Dinamo Tbilisi, West Ham had faced Castilla, Real Madrid's reserve side, in the first round. Their Spanish opponents had defied the odds to reach the 1980 Copa del Rey Final, where they were thrashed 6-1 by their older sibling. Castilla had defeated Athletic Bilbao, Real Sociedad and Sporting Gijón on the way to that Copa del Rey Final. Sociedad had only narrowly missed out on the La Liga title in 1979/80, making amends by taking the title for the following two seasons, while Gijón ended the campaign in third place. Bilbao rolled over the finish line in seventh.

During that remarkable cup run, Castilla had benefitted from the services of the likes of Ricardo Gallego, Javier Castañeda and Francisco Pineda, all of whom had moved forward to bigger things: with the Real Madrid senior side in the cases of Gallego and Pineda, and with Osasuna for Castañeda.

Despite the diaspora of talent during the summer of 1980, Castilla still beat West Ham's star-studded line-up in the first leg in Madrid. West Ham dominated the first half at the Santiago Bernabéu, David Cross putting the visitors ahead after only 15 minutes. From this solid foundation, however, they missed a succession of chances to put the game out of reach of Castilla, prior to the half-time whistle. There was a heavy price to pay for West Ham as Castilla threw together a stunning 12-minute spell during the second half, scoring three times to accumulate a hard-earned yet somehow fortuitous 3-1 lead to take to London for the second leg.

To double the woe for Lyall and his players, crowd disturbances led to approximately 50 West Ham supporters being chased across the terraces and ejected from the stadium after violence was ignited by one travelling fan urinating from an upper tier of the Bernabéu on to Castilla followers below. Outside the ground after the game, a West Ham supporter was killed when struck by a bus, completing their misery.

Within the slipstream of events in Madrid, West Ham were threatened with being banned from the tournament. It had been the club's first European venture since they had competed in the 1976 Cup Winners' Cup Final. However, the prospect of an outright ban was eventually averted. Instead, UEFA mirrored a similar sanction placed on Manchester United during the 1977/78 season which led to them playing at Plymouth Argyle's Home Park after altercations away to St Etienne. This consisted of a £7,750 fine and an insistence that West Ham's next two home European ties take place at least 300 kilometres (187 miles) away from Upton Park.

Having been offered the use of Sunderland's Roker Park, Lyall piloted West Ham through a Zürich appeal process which downgraded their punishment to no fine and one home tie to be played at Upton Park behind closed doors.

Thus, the second leg against Castilla was lent an almost eerie, and certainly echoey, atmosphere, accentuated by the added amplification of the referee's whistle, the increased 'doof' sound as foot met ball, and the audio of on-pitch shouts, which seemed to bounce back from the empty terraces. It was a sensation that was as close as you could



get to a fusion of European club competition and a local five-a-side night.

Yet none of this was enough to stop West Ham from running up a 5-1 victory that saw them through to the second round, all witnessed by 200 invited and UEFA-approved guests, 16 ball boys and the ITV production team, inclusive of their match commentator, Martin Tyler.

The first-round eccentricities didn't end with West Ham and Castilla either. AS Roma, Serie A's representatives in the tournament, stormed to a 3-0 first-leg win over Carl Zeiss Jena at the Stadio Olimpico, courtesy of goals from Roberto Pruzzo, Falcão and a young Carlo Ancelotti. They were then steamrolled 4-0 in the second leg at the Ernst-Abbe-Sportfeld in Jena.

Added to this heady concoction, Celtic fumbled their way out of the tournament at the first hurdle when they succumbed to the Romanians, FC Politehnica Timișoara, who were taking part in only their second ever European campaign. West Ham would deal with them comfortably in the next round, in what maybe should have been a 'Battle of Britain' encounter instead. Although UEFA, the FA, the SFA and the police forces of the east ends of both London and Glasgow might have breathed a long sigh of relief that Britain had swerved that battleground being drawn out on their respective doorsteps.

While an all-British spat was avoided, there was still a United Kingdom derby played out in that intriguing opening round of the 1980/81 Cup Winners' Cup. Newport County, Welsh of blood and geographical positioning, but of the English Third Division, found themselves in European combat as winners of the 1980 Welsh Cup Final,

where they had defeated Shrewsbury Town, a club hailing from the English county of Shropshire.

I know. You might have to re-read that paragraph a couple more times for the cross-border complexities to sink in.

Newport breezed past Crusaders, winning the first leg 4-0 at Somerton Park, before drifting along to a goalless draw having crossed the Irish Sea for the return game.

In the second round there was a similar outcome, except in reverse. Newport, armed with the goals of John Aldridge, cruised past the Norwegians of SK Hauger 6-0 in the second leg to propel themselves into an unlikely quarter-final towards the spring, having played out another goalless draw in the first leg, when once again on their travels.

For Carl Zeiss Jena, after their incredible comeback against Roma, they were dubiously rewarded by being paired with the tournament holders, Valencia. A 3-1 victory in the first leg in Jena proved to be marginally enough for the East Germans, when a 1-0 scoreline to Valencia at the Mestalla in the second leg brought the holders to within one more strike of an away-goal superiority.

Given the voracity of Carl Zeiss Jena's opponents during the first two rounds of the 1980/81 Cup Winners' Cup, it made the quarter-final prospect of Newport a welcoming mirage. This was also a Newport side who were denied the goal-getting services of the injured Aldridge.

At the Ernst-Abbe-Sportfeld however, Newport managed something which had proved to be beyond the capabilities of both Roma and Valencia. Len Ashurst's men returned to South Wales with a positive result following an impressive 2-2 draw, thanks to a brace of equalisers from the prolific lower-league marksman Tommy Tynan. The

second of those two levellers came with almost the last kick of the game.

In a game which was played out on the same evening as Dinamo Tbilisi were taking West Ham apart at Upton Park, the performances of the two remaining British clubs in the 1980/81 Cup Winners' Cup were the complete opposite in outcome to what had been expected.

Back at Somerton Park, Newport had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to become the first Third Division team to reach the semi-finals of a major European competition. However, they couldn't take advantage of either their hard work from the first leg or the fact that Carl Zeiss Jena were nursing both injuries and suspensions. The only goal of the game fell the way of the East Germans shortly before the half-hour mark, when Lothar Kurbjuweit struck a low free kick that swept past the defensive wall and caught the Newport goalkeeper, Gary Plumley, wrong-footed.

Plumley later gained national notoriety once again when he made a one-off appearance for Watford in the 1987 FA Cup semi-final, coming to the aid of Graham Taylor's side during a goalkeeping injury crisis. Plumley's father, Eddie, being the chief executive of the Vicarage Road club, had sent out the emergency call.

Newport's exit from the Cup Winners' Cup wasn't an insipid one, however, as they largely dominated the game and were denied progression to the semi-finals by a succession of reaction saves from the Carl Zeiss Jena goalkeeper, Hans-Ulrich Grapenthin. The goalposts and an outrageous number of goal-line clearances also thwarted Newport on the occasions that Grapenthin was unable to stop the multitude of goal-bound Newport efforts.

Within the eccentric spirit of the Cup Winners' Cup, Newport, having pushed Carl Zeiss Jena harder than both Roma and Valencia, went on to a mid-table Third Division finish, via a very real flirtation with relegation to the Fourth Division.

After being on the brink of bankruptcy just three years earlier, Newport would slip out of the Football League in 1988 and then go out of business less than a year later. The club swiftly reformed and started their climb back to the Football League from the Hellenic League, effectively four divisions below the promised land of the professional game. It was a stark eight-year step from the brink of the Cup Winners' Cup semi-final to the oblivion of February 1989.

Along with Dinamo Tbilisi and Carl Zeiss Jena, it was Benfica and Feyenoord who also made the semi-finals. Two former European Cup winners and members of an incredible list of 14 teams who won European football's biggest prize during the lifespan of the Cup Winners' Cup, yet never managed to win the latter tournament.

For Feyenoord, it was, remarkably, their first ever Cup Winners' Cup campaign. Neither they nor Benfica would ever make it beyond the semi-finals. While Feyenoord's path to the semi-finals hadn't been overly taxing, Benfica's had been an arduous one. Beginning with the preliminary round, they faced down the stubborn Dinamo Zagreb, the beaten 1979 European Cup finalists Malmö, and then Fortuna Düsseldorf, just two years on from them having faced Barcelona in perhaps the greatest Cup Winners' Cup Final of the lot.

Being made host to the 1981 final was possibly a nod of appreciation to Düsseldorf from UEFA for the part Fortuna

played in that indelible 1979 final. Indeed, Barcelona, for their part, hosted the 1982 final.

Both Feyenoord and Benfica were disadvantaged after the first legs of their respective semi-finals. Feyenoord were defeated 3-0 in Tbilisi, while Benfica lost 2-0 in Jena. In the return fixtures, both Feyenoord and Benfica drew to within one goal of levelling their ties, with over half an hour still to play. However, the energy they expended in chasing their Eastern Bloc opponents, especially ones who were known for their pace and endurance levels, was quickly spent.

The prospect of a historically pleasing and almost reassuring Benfica vs Feyenoord 1981 Cup Winners' Cup Final was instead exchanged for the hipster's utopia of a Carl Zeiss Jena vs Dinamo Tbilisi final.

Carl Zeiss Jena had been semi-finalists in 1962, under the name of SC Motor Jena. Comfortably beaten by Atlético Madrid, they had even embraced another trip to South Wales long before their visit to Somerton Park to take on Newport in 1981. They had faced Swansea Town in the 1961/62 preliminary round.

A peculiar link was provided by the Austrian referee, Friedrich Seipelt. Kept busy by the players of Swansea Town and SC Motor Jena in the late summer of 1961, he was a referee of purpose. He had officiated in Sweden at the 1958 World Cup where he took charge of the group game between Czechoslovakia and Northern Ireland, plus the Brazil vs Wales quarter-final. After handing in his whistle in 1966, Seipelt was employed by FIFA as a referee instructor, eventually becoming the president of UEFA's Arbitration Commission in 1972. It was a position he held until his unexpected death while waiting for a flight at

Vienna International Airport, just short of one week prior to the 1981 Cup Winners' Cup Final.

On a day of strange events, just two hours before kick-off, Pope John Paul II was shot four times in St Peter's Square by the gunman Mehmet Ali Ağca.

It turned out that 13 May 1981 was a fittingly eccentric day for Carl Zeiss Jena and Dinamo Tbilisi to be contesting the Cup Winners' Cup Final, in front of such a small gathering of spectators. Around 1,000 made the journey from East Germany, while there were arguably as many members of the Dinamo Tbilisi official party as there were supporters making the trip from Georgia. In their desperation to pad out the crowd at the 68,000-capacity Rheinstadion, UEFA gave away 2,000 free tickets to local schools. While it may have been a commercial disaster for UEFA, the game itself was one which deserved a full house.

With Carl Zeiss Jena's well-organised man-to-man marking system and Dinamo Tbilisi looking to exploit their own propensity for speed, it made for an intriguing and absorbing game of football.

During the early exchanges of the first half in Düsseldorf, the game was brought to a halt as the ball harmlessly rolled out of play for a Carl Zeiss Jena throw-in. A period of silence was then observed for Seipelt before the game resumed. Gerhard Hoppe opened the scoring for Carl Zeiss Jena in the 63rd minute, finishing off a timeless pass-and-move passage of play during which they played Dinamo Tbilisi at their own counter-attacking game. Hoppe scored with the outside of his right foot at the end of a nine-pass move which swept from one end of the pitch to the other.

It was a lead which lasted for only four minutes, as a succession of rash Carl Zeiss Jena attempts to halt the Dinamo Tbilisi tide simply gifted Gutsaev the opportunity to drive the equaliser home. With Carl Zeiss Jena's play becoming more ragged, and Dinamo Tbilisi pondering whether to stick or twist as extra time loomed on the horizon, the winning goal came with only four minutes left to play.

Vitaly Daraselia scored that winning goal.

The following night, at Wembley Stadium, Tottenham Hotspur won the 1981 FA Cup Final replay, gaining with it a place in the 1981/82 Cup Winners' Cup. Ricardo Villa's winning goal against Manchester City has been shown so many times, as a homage to the FA Cup, it is almost as if a watching world became desensitised to it. This is nothing other than insane, of course. Villa's goal remains one of the greatest of all time.

Unbeknown to many football watchers, Daraselia's winning goal for Dinamo Tbilisi, not much more than 24 hours earlier, bore striking similarities to the goal Villa would score to win the FA Cup. While the two goals weren't identical, they share that unmistakable twist and turn within the penalty area that totally sells the respective defences. They were even both scored at the same end of the pitch from the perspectives of where the television cameras were situated in Düsseldorf and London.

And with that, the 1981 Cup Winners' Cup was won. A team of immense speed, skill and beauty, it would have been a travesty had Dinamo Tbilisi not had their moment of European glory. They would reach the semi-final as holders and supply four members of the Soviet Union's

1982 World Cup squad, yet they were also a team shaded by darkness.

In December 1982, Daraselia was tragically killed when his car fell from a mountain road and was swept away by a raging river. He was just 25. Kipiani, the talented attacking midfielder, also died as a result of injuries he received in a car crash, in 2001, at the age of 49, while Shengelia died at 55 of a brain haemorrhage, in 2012. Their legendary moments flicker on to the observant but fall under the radar of those who never knew the simple pleasures of seeing their team of choice dismantled by opponents from behind the Iron Curtain.

The 1980/81 Cup Winners' Cup remains a mystery to many; the 1980/81 Cup Winners' Cup remains one of football's best kept secrets.