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# APPLAUDING THE KOP

THE STORY OF  
**LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB'S  
GOALKEEPERS**

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P A U L   W I L K E S



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## **The First Custodians,** *Paving the Way*

THE FORMATION of Liverpool Football Club in 1892 saw John Houlding, who owned Anfield, task John McKenna with the search for players. McKenna was acting as both recruiter and manager, in pursuit of talent that could operate in the shadow of league champions Everton. His main area of expertise proved to be Glasgow, although they naturally took players from their old club that had now moved to Goodison Park.

Sydney Ross became the first goalkeeper, or ‘custodian’ – as they were known in the 1890s – to play a competitive game for Liverpool. He was born to parents Alexander and Elizabeth on 8 June 1869 in Edinburgh. Ross signed from Scottish club Cambuslang, on the south-east outskirts of Glasgow. The 23-year-old was only 5ft 7in tall but that didn’t mean he was easy to beat. ‘The position of goalkeeper is perfectly safe in the hands of Sydney Ross,’ pronounced local sports paper *Field Sport* before an official ball had been kicked. ‘His display in the practice matches stamps him as one of the finest custodians who ever appeared in a team.’ His agility and communication skills seemed to be his greatest asset.

Aided by an impressive defence, he kept nine clean sheets in 18 matches as they won the Lancashire League. Their opening match

of the 1892/93 season saw them thrash Higher Walton 8-0. Ross broke his leg in March 1893 in a Lancashire Cup second-round game with Bootle. It meant that his contract wasn't renewed, and he transferred back to his former side in the May. Billy McOwen took his place in the team and the Blackburn-born goalkeeper was instrumental in the Second Division. Liverpool collected 50 points from a possible 56 and were unbeaten. McOwen saved an incredible 11 of the 12 penalties that he faced and only conceded 13 goals as the Reds were promoted to the top flight. He decided to retire from the professional game and concentrate on his job as a dentist.

William McCann joined from Abercorn FC and played in Liverpool's first season in the First Division. He wasn't the only new signing that didn't hit the ground running, as they took ten matches to get their first victory and were relegated. An incredible 39 goals conceded in 15 league games ensured that his stay lasted just eight months. Matt McQueen was next, and he was arguably the most versatile player ever to play for Liverpool. McQueen started his career as a forward before moving to full-back and then goalkeeper. He played in every position and was part of two Second Division-winning squads, making a total of 150 appearances. His adaptability wasn't only confined to the pitch though, as he later became a linesman and then a director and manager at the club.

Harry Storer was the first goalkeeper to hold down the position at Liverpool for a sustained period, when he signed in December 1895 from Arsenal for £100. Storer was also flexible in sport, having played six games of cricket for his home county of Derbyshire. The stopper would be number one for the next three seasons on the football field, with Tom Watson as manager from the summer of 1896. In September 1897, Storer had a particularly good game as they recorded their first win over Everton. Watson's tactical approach saw Liverpool become more defensively solid, which enabled Storer to concede fewer goals. Liverpool cemented

their position as a top-tier side in those years, even finishing second in 1898/99.

The next season started badly when the Reds lost their first eight matches and Storer was replaced by Bill Perkins between the posts. Perkins had joined from Luton Town in the March and made his debut a week later in a 3-2 win over Newcastle United. He was the first Liverpool goalkeeper to win a league title, as Watson's men secured the trophy in 1901. Only Perkins, Tom Robertson and Bill Goldie started all 34 games in the league that term, as they lined up in a 2-3-5 formation. In 1902/03, Perkins shared the goalkeeping duties with Peter Platt before the new signing from Blackburn Rovers eventually made the position his own. Platt started the next year as first choice with Perkins leaving for Northampton Town, but it was disastrous for the club as they were relegated to the Second Division.

The experienced Ned Doig joined from Watson's old side Sunderland, who were known as the 'Team of all the Talents'. Liverpool paid £150 for him in the summer of 1904. The 37-year-old instantly became a fan favourite, with his ability to punch the ball clear due to his boxing credentials. 'The veteran has displayed all his old ability, and although he has seen so many years' service he is as agile and clever as ever,' read the club programme in November 1904. Liverpool were promoted back to the top division at the first attempt.

However, their move back into the big time didn't start well for the team or Doig. They lost five of their first eight games including heavy defeats to Everton and Aston Villa, with Doig conceding 20 goals. Watson had no time for sentimentalism, and he sent a postcard to Doig's address informing him he was no longer required. The promising Sam Hardy was signed from Chesterfield. The defensive improvement was immediate, and Liverpool saw only 26 goals against them in the following 30 league matches. This enabled them to win their second league title in five years.

Hardy grew in stature and, in 1907, he made his England debut at Goodison Park. 'To me his intuition seemed extraordinary,' remarked his eventual successor Kenneth Campbell. 'He seemed to place himself right in the spot where a shot was to come in, and by doing so was able to clear his lines with the least possible fuss. Frankly, my ideas of goalkeeping underwent a change, and, although I had a fairly respectable reputation as a keeper at that time, my own feelings were that I was but a tyro. And right here just let me say that I was indebted to Sam for many valuable tips during his term at Anfield while I was there.' Hardy earned himself the nickname 'Safe and Steady Sam' and he was their first goalkeeper to make over 200 appearances for the club. He stayed at Watson's Liverpool until he left for Aston Villa in 1912.

William Scott had been the goalkeeper across Stanley Park for the last eight years and his brother Elisha was given a trial at Everton off the back of his recommendation. However, after they deemed he was too small, Liverpool spotted his capability and signed him as a replacement for Hardy. 'I don't think Scott ever weighed more than ten stone odd,' read one column in the *Liverpool Echo*. 'The story goes he wore an extra jersey to make him look bigger and more formidable.' It seemed to work.

The rules changed that year for goalkeepers, which meant they were only allowed to handle the ball inside of their own penalty area. For the next three seasons, Scottish international Campbell was Liverpool's goalkeeper, with Scott as back-up. The club's results were less than spectacular, although they did remain in the First Division and finished runners-up to Crystal Palace in the 1914 FA Cup Final.

Scott made his debut on New Year's Day in 1913, when he kept Newcastle United at bay in a 0-0 draw. The Geordies were so impressed that they tried to buy him afterwards, while it was reported that he had played with an injured arm. 'His debut was brilliant and a pleasing augury,' read the review of his performance in the *Liverpool Echo*. A year later William joined Elisha at Anfield

after he made the transfer from Leeds United. The First World War interrupted football between 1915 and 1919, with Liverpool competing in the Lancashire Section for two of those years. When normal proceedings resumed, Liverpool were much better, and Campbell had a fight to keep his place. He initially played while Scott recovered from an operation, but the Irishman impressed in February 1920 and a month later Campbell had asked for a transfer.

Elisha Scott's return after the war heralded a new era for the number one jersey, with David Ashworth now manager following the death of Watson. Ashworth's approach was based on a solid defence that conceded few goals and Scott was a huge factor. Liverpool won back-to-back league titles in 1922 and 1923, with Scott missing just three games. 'To prove successful, the goalkeeper must learn the art of always being in the right place at the right moment,' wrote Scott in an article about his two decades at Liverpool. 'He has to keep his eyes on the ball all the time, but he cannot afford to ignore any opponents, who come within shooting range of the net. In guarding the net, you must not be too obvious in your methods. Forwards practice all kinds of tricks to disguise their real intentions, and goalkeepers must be just as cunning.'

Arthur Riley began to give Scott competition at the end of the 1920s and he eventually replaced the legend on a full-time basis in 1934, when Scott joined Belfast Celtic as player-manager. In Scott's final home match against Chelsea, he took to the microphone to articulate his feelings towards the supporters. 'We have always been the best of friends and shall always remain so,' he said. 'I have finished with English association football. Last but not least, my friends of the Kop. I cannot thank them sufficiently. They have inspired me. God bless you all!' When Anfield was redeveloped in December 2014, the club placed granite benches in front of the new Main Stand. Scott's is one of the seven in a special project called 'The Men who Built Anfield' along with



Billy Liddell, Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Kenny Dalglish, John Barnes and Steven Gerrard.

On Scott's bench reads a quote from Everton's legendary striker Dixie Dean, 'The greatest I've ever seen.' The forward used to send a tube of aspirins to Scott the night before a game with a note that told him to sleep well ahead of the goals he was going to score against him the following day. They shared a friendship and unique footballing battle throughout their careers.

Liverpool continued to struggle over the next few years as they finished in the top half of the league just once in six seasons. The Second World War started in 1939 with Riley and fellow South African goalkeeper Dirk Kemp made sergeants in the 9th King's Liverpool Battalion. Top-level football was lost for another seven campaigns, but when it restarted Liverpool profited.

Cyril Sidlow joined George Kay's side in February 1946 from Wolverhampton Wanderers. He was described as a good shot-stopper and was also among the first to throw the ball to his defenders in order to retain possession. He played in 34 of the 42 games of the 1946/47 season, with stiff competition coming in the form of Charlie Ashcroft and Ray Minshull. Liverpool, with a team that contained Paisley, Liddell and Albert Stubbins, won the league title in the first year back following the war. It went right to the wire though, with Kay's men winning an infamous encounter with Wolves, but having to wait two weeks for Stoke City to play their final fixture. Liverpool were beating Everton in the Lancashire Cup Final when it was announced over the PA at Anfield that Stoke had lost at Sheffield United and scuppered their own title chance. Unfortunately, this wasn't the sign of things to come, as Liverpool struggled in the subsequent seasons. They lost the FA Cup Final in 1950 to Arsenal and their league positions were no better than eighth. Their decline continued when Kay left in 1951 for health reasons and Don Welsh took the managerial mantle. Sidlow departed the club in 1953 and Liverpool were relegated in 1954 with Ashcroft now in the number one jersey.

It was a difficult start to life in the second tier, with Liverpool in serious danger of dropping down a further division. Dave Underwood started six out of the first seven league games in goal, which resulted in just one win. Ashcroft regained his place for the next couple of months, but a 3-2 defeat to Luton Town prompted another change. Liverpool's third South African goalkeeper, Doug Rudham, was now tasked with the role having just signed from Johannesburg Rangers, while Welsh also made changes to the defence. He kept the club's first clean sheet of the season in a 1-0 win over Nottingham Forest, but it did little to stop the onslaught upon their backline in subsequent matches. They had lost 12 times on the road before the end of the calendar year including a record 9-1 defeat at Birmingham City. Liverpool didn't get relegated and saw some improvement the following season when Underwood and Rudham shared the responsibilities. The club finished third, but Welsh's inability to gain promotion saw him resign in 1956 and former Liverpool wing-half Phil Taylor was given the task of managing the club.

He immediately signed Tommy Younger from Hibernian, who had won two Scottish league titles with the custodian. Younger missed just six matches over the next three seasons.. However, the Reds narrowly missed out on regaining their top-flight status during this period. Younger left for a player-manager role at Falkirk in 1959 and in turn they sent Bert Slater in the opposite direction. Slater's small demeanour saw him earn the nickname 'Shorty'. He lasted only three matches as Taylor's first choice, even though they won two of them. The defence were still leaking goals and he conceded seven goals in games with Cardiff City, Bristol City and Hull City, so Rudham came back into the side.

Taylor left in the November and a month later he was replaced by Bill Shankly. The Scotsman restored Slater to the line-up and, although Liverpool finished just outside the promotion places in the next two years, they were laying the foundations for the future. Off the pitch, Shankly constructed the now infamous

'Boot Room' personnel with Bob Paisley bolstered to first-team coach and Joe Fagan given reserve manager duties. On the field, the established captain Ronnie Moran was assisted by Ron Yeats and Gerry Byrne in defence, a young Ian Callaghan was given an opportunity and Ian St John and Roger Hunt formed a solid strike force. Training sessions were now systematic and no longer had the relaxed atmosphere of previous eras. Shankly installed many of the principles that we come to expect of the modern-day football club. He was also perhaps the first Liverpool manager to have complete control over his own team selection, with the directors often interfering in the past. That possibly explains why so few goalkeepers were able to get a consistent run in the team.

Slater lost his place at the end of the 1961/62 term and Jim Furnell played in the final 13 games as Liverpool were finally promoted back among the elite of the country. Furnell began the next season in goal, but then he broke his finger in training. 'I went down to collect the ball in a five-a-side and caught the finger on the ground,' said Furnell to the *Lancashire Telegraph* in 1998. 'Shanks took me out of goal and made me complete the match up front. He wouldn't believe that it was broken, but Bob Paisley insisted I should go along to have it checked out by the doctors. I spent a week in hospital, needed a bone graft and didn't play again for months. Didn't realise it at the time, but it was the end for me at Anfield. That's when I saw another side to Shankly. If you were injured it was as though you stopped existing. He didn't come to visit me and more or less ignored me when I reported in at the club for daily treatment.' A 22-year-old Tommy Lawrence seized his opportunity and never looked back.