



Double Acts

Julie Welch

A Modern History of Tottenham
in 10½ Strike
Partnerships

FOOTBALL SHORTS

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Strike Partnership Zero

Smith and Allen

17 April 1961: White Hart Lane on an overcast evening. Spurs had left it pretty late to clinch the title, as far as the fans were concerned anyway. This was a game they were expected to win without getting their hair messed up, but instead they were one down most of the way through the first half, from a free kick awarded to Sheffield Wednesday just outside the box and a goal by Don Megson. After that they hammered for a long time at Wednesday's locked and bolted door; almost three-quarters of an hour of grappling, shirt-tugging and shin-hacking endured, with half-time nearly up when the best strike force in the league turned it into the night of nights.

'SMITH PIERCES WALL OF STEEL' punned the *Daily Express*; 'SMITH AND ALLEN CLINCH VICTORY

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IN INSPIRED TWO MINUTES', said the *Daily Telegraph*, and really that was all you needed to know, except that it started with a classic bit of Terry Dyson (the shortest player on the field by several inches), as he beat Peter Swan (the tallest) to Peter Baker's clearance and headed the ball into the goal area. Bobby Smith, wearing two Wednesday defenders as accessories, flicked the ball over another one's head: right foot, left foot, *blam*, a volley into the roof of the net. When Smith's goal went in, the first team-mate to run towards him was Les Allen.

And Wednesday just went like a piece of snapped elastic. Another free kick, this time in Tottenham's favour. Danny Blanchflower signalled Maurice Norman to move up and the usual perfect placement followed, right on to Norman's head. Norman nodded it sideways and Allen hooked it waist-high past Ron Springett. And this time Smith ran towards Allen.

Out there in the rest of the world Yuri Gagarin had just become the first man in space, Elizabeth Taylor was winning her Best Actress Oscar for *Butterfield 8* and 1,400 Cuban exiles were landing in the Bay of Pigs in a doomed attempt to overthrow

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Fidel Castro, but in this part of north London even the second coming would have made no impact. The Park Lane and the Paxton ends were emptying on to the pitch, sprinting towards the directors' box, chanting 'We want Danny! We want Danny!' The whole team gathered in the directors' box, which brought a roar even Gagarin might have heard if he'd cupped his ears. There were fans with flares on the end of poles, Les Allen hanging over the edge of the box and waving a bath towel for a banner, people clambering in to hug their heroes. Blanchflower didn't speak, for a change. This was a team affair; everyone had to share the glory.

It hadn't always been Smith and Allen. Five years previously, Bobby Smith was a striker in search of a partner; the pairing up front had been Smith and A.N. Other. Wind back the reel to the 1955/56 seasons. Yes, that really was Spurs in the relegation zone. When Bobby Smith signed that December, Tottenham Hotspur were one place off the bottom of the table, with their 1951 title win a receding memory. Their great game-changing manager Arthur Rowe had been discarded by the club due to his mental health breakdown, and his

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replacement – the one-club man Jimmy Anderson – had been promoted above his competence and was at odds with Blanchflower. While Anderson failed to cut it in the dug-out, though, there was one area in which he was smart: he couldn't half spot a player. Ron Henry, Peter Baker, Terry Dyson and Cliff Jones were all his recruits. Maurice Norman arrived from East Anglia in November 1955, and no more than a month later came another part of the Double side-to-be.

Bobby Smith had come down to London in 1950 from his Yorkshire village. An ironstone miner's son for whom Middlesbrough was the metropolis, Smith had been playing for his local Redcar club when Chelsea snapped him up. You would have to hang around a long time before you confused Lingdale in the North Riding with Sloane Square and the King's Road and, 17 years old and fazed by the change of environment, Smith fled home for a while before giving the big city another try. Finding his feet at Stamford Bridge, he exploded into action with 18 goals in 48 top-tier games in his first two seasons as a pro. Even so, by the late summer of 1955 his progress had stalled. It made no difference that

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he scored four times in seven games once the new season opened; by the time winter had set in he was a Tottenham man.

You couldn't say the fans were bowled over from the off. Smith, they opined, was unworthy of the Spurs shirt. They expected flair and he had arrived at White Hart Lane with the reputation of a bulldozing front man, mullering defenders and merrily dishing it out before it got dished out to him. As Jimmy Greaves was later to observe, 'Smithy didn't think he was in the game until he'd hammered into the goalkeeper in the earliest possible moment in the match.' In those early days, no one realised he was capable of guile and finesse when it mattered, a thug with a side-hustle as an artist, or maybe it was the other way round.

Smith had been brought in by Anderson as an upgrade on the frustrating Alfie Stokes, a local lad who came to attention playing for non-league Clapton. Stokes had the kind of looks that fifty years later would have swept him into any boy band, and for a while gave the impression of having the same sort of stardust in his boots, scoring on his debut against Bolton and troubling the keeper twice for

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England Under-23s in his first international. That wasn't the whole story, though. The dazzling first-half performances were frequently followed up by 45 minutes when he just ran out of juice.

Not that Spurs were short of alternatives. Just look at the scorers in the run of league games starting with Smith's debut:

*24 December, Spurs 2 Luton Town 1: Robb,
Duquemin*

*26 December, Spurs 4 West Bromwich Albion 1:
Norman, Brooks (pen), Duquemin 2*

27 December, West Bromwich Albion 1 Spurs 0

*31 December, Spurs 2 Charlton Athletic 1:
Duquemin, Robb*

14 January, Arsenal 0 Spurs 1: Robb

That tells you something. Smith didn't find the net till the end of January, in the 1-1 home draw with Everton. By the end of the season, his tally had risen to 12, bulked up by a final-day hat-trick against Sheffield United, but even then his perfect match was a long way off. Over the next few seasons the hope was that Johnny Brooks would be The

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One. Brooks had glamour. He was one of the first footballers in Britain to advertise shampoo, putting his name and handsome head of curls to Max Factor For Men. There was no doubt he was very buff and he was also a gifted footballer: superb touch, brilliant dribbler, all the bells and whistles. On the minus side, he never really fancied it when faced with defenders who were more likely to break his legs than rumple his hair.

And what about Len Duquemin, the chunky warhorse who had led the line when Spurs claimed the top prize in 1951? Yep, still there in 1957. Dave Dunmore had been signed as his replacement, but Duquemin wasn't having that and fought him off the same as he'd fought off Stokes. Smith and Dunmore didn't gel either. There was Tommy Harmer in the number 8 shirt, of course, but he did his own thing. In fact, if anybody was Smith's partner back then, it was the outside-left, George Robb. An Arthur Rowe signing, Robb was fast approaching heirloom status but he still had goals in him and, more importantly for Smith, he provided the assists.

The 1955/56 season had ended with Spurs too close to the drop zone for comfort. Things were on

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the up, though, for them and for Smith. In 1956/57, they finished second. In the 1957/58 season they ended up third, with a side augmented by the arrival from Swansea that February of the flying winger Cliff Jones, and Smith on a roll. His 36 goals – including five braces and three hat-tricks as well as the four that battered Aston Villa – equalled the record set by George Harper in 1931, when Spurs were a second-tier side.

With that in mind, 1958/59 was supposed to be the season they won the title, but instead it was time for Spurs to undergo one of their periodic spells of turmoil. Cliff Jones broke his leg in pre-season in a tackle by Peter Baker; Blanchflower fell out with Jimmy Anderson again; and August yielded no points at all, a sudden dead zone. September and the start of October weren't much better either and, as autumn set in, Jimmy Anderson – by now running on empty – stood down.

11 October 1958. If this is a history of modern Spurs, that's when it really started. The team only found out 15 minutes before kick-off against Everton that Bill Nicholson, their brusque, razor-haired wing-half-turned-coach, was now top man.

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The scoreline that day was bonkers: 10-4 to the Lilywhites. In all their days, Tottenham Hotspur had never come away with double figures in a league match. 'HARMER INSPIRATION OF GOAL RIOT' was the *Daily Telegraph* headline:

'No one benefited more than Smith, who scored four, and Robb, who looked like the star winger he was a few seasons ago. As a result, Everton were in trouble from the third minute when Stokes put Spurs in front. Though Jimmy Harris hit back with a fifth-minute goal for Everton, nothing could stop Harmer and his men from sweeping comfortably into a 6-1 lead by half-time...'

By then, of course, the contest was pretty well killed off. Smith scored four in all. Even a defender, John Ryden, hit the back of the net. Everton were that bad. If you're Spurs, you probably know about Harmer's warning to Nicholson afterwards: 'We don't score ten every game.' 'It can only get worse from here,' Blanchflower added, and he wasn't wrong. Smith carried on banging them in, but often they were consolation goals that went along with defeats. From 22 November to 13 December, they came away with a solitary point from seven league

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games. Between the end of January and the start of March they notched up two points in five. Saved from the drop largely by Smith scoring four against West Bromwich Albion in the penultimate game, they finished up fifth from bottom.

One good thing did happen towards the end of that season. Click, click, click: Nicholson, the great assembler of human components, was putting together the Double team. Dave Mackay made his debut in March 1959, though nobody got a glimpse of what that would mean at first since, ruled out by a foot injury, he didn't reappear till that August. By then, Nicholson had added John White. There was only one more piece to slot into place – a strike partner for Bobby Smith.

Imagine the carry-on if this were Nicholson trying to sign a striker today. It would go on for months. In contrast, the process that took Les Allen from Chelsea to Spurs took all of a couple of weeks, in addition to which it cost Spurs nothing. He was 22 and had been on Chelsea's books since his teens but – upstaged by a wonderkid called Jimmy Greaves – had spent most of his time in the reserves. Nicholson had been keeping track of him,

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though, and liked the look of him. A wasted talent, in his opinion: a bit on the slow side but good at sniffing out chances and a reliable finisher. Even then, Nicholson was to claim he didn't set out to get him. Everything was initiated by Ted Drake, Chelsea's manager. In spite of Greaves, Chelsea were floundering and Drake thought Johnny Brooks would be the answer to his prayers. Nicholson's response to Drake was damning: 'What do you want him for? He's not the kind of player who will get you out of a hole.' Drake persisted, and that was it – a straight swap, with the despised glamour boy going one way and the underused unknown going the other.

'I went into training as normal and got called in,' said Allen. 'Ted Drake said, "I'd like you to go to Tottenham," and I said, "Why?" "I'm doing a deal with them and they've asked for you." I was flabbergasted. I didn't know what to think. Tottenham were a bigger club than Chelsea. We met Bill Nick in Ilford where my dad used to work. He was a very clever man, Bill. He picked John White out, Dave, Bill Brown. "You're the last piece in the jigsaw," Bill said. "I've been watching you. I admired

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the way you scored against us.” That was it. Johnny went that way and I went this way. The next day I was training with Tottenham.’

A burly, frowning, shy lad, Allen was there to give the attack more bite, but the impression was that he felt undermined at first by a sense of inferiority in that team of stars. Blanchflower, Mackay, Jones, White – all world-class talent. Smith wasn’t far behind. The late David Lacey of *The Guardian* once saw two blokes having a punch-up on the terraces at White Hart Lane over who was the better striker, Smith or Brian Clough. That was one of the afternoons when Smith scored a hat-trick, which could have settled the argument. Even the uncapped players in that side would have been welcomed with a brass band and bunting by any other team in the country. Terry Medwin and Mel Hopkins were internationals and they were playing in the stiffs. As Blanchflower said of Allen: ‘He looked careworn before his time. It was only when he was picked for the England Under-23 side that we realised how young he was.’

In lifestyle and personality, these strike partners were pretty much opposites. Smith was a bit of a

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naughty boy. He lived the life: boozers, the ladies and, above all, bookies. When I say Bobby liked a bet, he *really* liked a bet. Allen, in contrast, was a family man, cautious, unshowy, matter-of-fact. ‘He was a second centre-forward for us,’ Blanchflower wrote later, ‘with an unobtrusive style for scoring goals – a silent killer. He was always better than he appeared to be.’

The 1959/60 season was when Tottenham should have done the Double but didn’t (it’s a Spurs trope, that). The new strike partnership debuted on 19 December against Newcastle United and drew a blank, but a week later Allen stuck two in the net in the 4-2 win away to Leeds. Two days into 1960, he scored the winner at Birmingham City. A fortnight later, he and Smith did for Arsenal between them – 3-0, Allen getting two of the goals. The week after that, Smith’s two goals did for Manchester United. At that point the Double seemed a real prospect, even if a 2-2 draw away to Crewe Alexandra in the FA Cup fourth round was a reality check: ‘CREWE SHOW UP SPURS’ LIMITATIONS’ intoned the *Daily Telegraph*, grudgingly conceding ‘Spurs may or may not win the League Championship but judging

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by their efforts at Crewe the Double is beyond them.’ The replay, of course, is part of folklore, a spectacular display of Tottenham’s strike force: a 13-2 rout delivered in front of an audience of 64,365, with so many goals that in the end you almost lost count. The only forward who didn’t score that night was John White, for a change. Smith got four but Allen outdid him with five, a defining night for him – proof that he was no longer a nonentity but very much Smith’s equal partner. Meanwhile, the *Daily Telegraph* reporter had to perform a rapid reverse ferret: ‘Spurs sounded an unmistakable warning at White Hart Lane last night that nothing and nobody will be allowed this season to stop them pulling off footballing’s dream – the double of League Championship and F.A. Cup.’

This was Spurs, though. Drawn at home to Blackburn Rovers in the fifth round, their opponents put three past them and *pffft*, the Double was gone. As for the title, that wasn’t going to happen either. The game that might have made the difference is another one that has gone down in folklore: Spurs v Manchester City, 16 April 1960. In the closing microseconds of the first half, Tottenham won a

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penalty for handball. Bert Trautmann saved Cliff Jones's spot kick but Jones tapped in the rebound. His goal was disallowed. The referee had added just enough time for the penalty to be taken and had blown the whistle the moment Trautmann had made the save. In the second half, City scored the only goal of the game, effectively putting the kibosh on Tottenham's title hopes. That's the legend, anyway. If the referee hadn't blown his whistle... If City hadn't scored... In football, there's always an 'if'.

At the end of August 1960, Smith scored a hat-trick against Blackpool that meant he had scored more goals than any other Spurs player ever, overtaking the record 138 set by George Hunt back in the 1930s. A lot more were on their way. In the Cup semi-final at Villa Park the following April, Spurs beat Burnley 3-0, Smith providing two of the goals. The Spurs fans carried him off the pitch. Fast-forward to the Wembley final and 6 May 1961. Much better games had happened that season, everyone was agreed on that, but they did it. Smith opened the scoring, Dyson added the second. It would have been good for Allen to get on

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the scoreboard but he played a key part too, though not in the way he would have preferred; in the 19th minute his freak tangle of legs with Len Chalmers left the Leicester right-back a hobbling passenger for the rest of the afternoon, which didn't do much for the spectacle.

Anyway, that was it – the Double done, the century's biggest challenge in football completed. All the joy is there in the photos: Allen and Mackay on the pitch, grinning, arms linked; the obligatory gathering in the communal bath, stark naked but accessorised by the odd glass of beer; the open-top bus parade along the High Road, Allen on the front row with Smith at his shoulder. Records had gone tumbling: 11 wins on the bounce at the start of the season – best in Football League history; unbeaten in the first 16 games; 31 wins in 42 games; 16 away wins; only 17 players used; 50 points from only 29 games – all First Division records, with 66 points and 33 from away games equalling the Arsenal record set 30 years back. Smith's goal tally was 28 in the league and five in the Cup. Allen's was close to matching it, with 23 in the league and four in the Cup.

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And it still wasn't enough. Who would have guessed – who could possibly have imagined as they celebrated on the Wembley pitch that May afternoon – that an axe was about to be driven through the partnership?