



GREATEST GAMES

EVERTON

THE TOFFEES FIFTY
FINEST MATCHES

JIM KEOGHAN

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Introduction

IN late March 2014, on an overcast, yet clammy spring afternoon, my four-year-old son and I navigated our way past the delicatessens, the fusion cuisine restaurants, the pop-up Iberian cheese markets of south-west London and headed towards Craven Cottage.

This was not the first game I had planned for Jamie. That should have been at Goodison. But cost, ticket availability and an unwillingness to take a four-year-old on a 600-mile round trip meant that, like many an offspring from our club's wide diaspora, he would first see the Blues on foreign soil.

It was the business end of the first Martinez season (or, as it's otherwise known, the 'good Martinez season'). Flying high in the league, winning with ease and playing attractive, attack-minded football, this was an Everton side that seemed to promise so much.

After making our way through the unerringly polite Fulham fans (all of whom appeared to be eating hot dogs), we took our seats amongst our own, savouring the sights and sounds of the only part of the ground that appeared to contain any atmosphere.

As a jaded Blue, who in 35 years of following the club thought he had experienced pretty much everything football had to offer, I had sort of accepted that defining experiences were a thing of the past (or *my* past at least). But I was wrong.

On that unremarkable afternoon, one on which an accomplished Everton side easily dealt with relegation-threatened Fulham, emerging 3–1 victors, I got to see the game through my son's eyes: the excitement of the players coming out, the joy of being able to sing and shout amongst other fans, the delight of seeing your team score and win.

It felt new, novel *and* defining. It was, in short, a magical experience.

At the end of the 90, as we made our way once again through their fans, who remained happy and polite despite an anaemic performance and the prospect of almost certain relegation (perhaps those hot dogs had a palliative quality?), I felt happy in a way that was almost unrecognisable to me as an Evertonian – a sense of untarnished joy, with no undercurrent of anxiety.

But, as wonderful as I felt, I am almost certain that no other Blue felt the same (unless they'd also been on the hot dogs). For them, it was simply an away win. Unquestionably a good one – but nothing to write home about.

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And that's the problem when it comes to defining a great game. So much of what we consider 'great' is wrapped up in how we experience a match. I loved that Fulham match, and to me it is my happiest moment as a Blue. But I doubt it would make the list of the top 500 Everton matches of all time.

The idea of what makes a 'Great Game' is something that has consumed me over the course of writing this book. The knee-jerk answer is one that yields tangible success. It's the matches when titles were won, FA Cups lifted, when a European trophy was brought home. And that is true. There is something undeniably special about opening the trophy cabinet and adding another trinket to the collection.

Because so few clubs, certainly in modern football, ever get to bring home silverware, it's important to recognise Everton's achievements. To win the league nine times, to hold aloft five FA Cups and to win a European trophy are markers of success that need to be celebrated. In football's long history, we are amongst the lucky few to have periodically enjoyed success at the highest level.

So you can put a big tick next to silverware.

But what happens if silverware isn't on the agenda? In recent years, as football has changed, tangible success has become considerably harder to come by. Since the inauguration of the Premier League, English football has become a closed shop to a degree never previously seen. With the exception of the Leicester City aberration and Blackburn Rovers' cash-fuelled tilt at the top, just a handful of clubs have claimed the title since 1992.

In the FA Cup, the modern elite has enjoyed just as tight a dominance, with, again, only two clubs – Portsmouth and Wigan Athletic – breaking the stranglehold that the likes of Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal have had on the trophy.

Only the League Cup (generally unloved by the elite of late) has offered any chance of silverware to lesser lights. But even here, although the competition has enjoyed a much more diverse number of winners, with clubs such as Swansea City, Birmingham City and Middlesbrough claiming the cup over the past 25 years, they are still outnumbered by the big guns.

Everton, long an elite club themselves, by accident and design forwent membership of the *crème de la crème* during the 1990s and never got it back. As such, they joined the swollen ranks of those for whom tangible success is consistently out of reach.

Because of this, the definition of 'success' alters in the closing stages of the book. It embraces different kinds of achievements, ones thought beyond the modern capabilities of the club, such as qualifying for the Champions League, reaching the FA Cup Final and actually beating Liverpool. These matches might not seem great by historic standards – but, in a modern context, and for the modern Evertonian, they have still mattered.

But 'success' isn't everything. Games can be great for other reasons too.

Sometimes a game is simply magnificent on its own merit. There have been several occasions in the club's history when, without warning, a match of outstanding quality has taken place (usually against Sunderland for some reason).

The need to win sometimes robs fans of the simple enjoyment that football played well can provide. Luckily for us Evertonians, because we follow a club so well versed in the need to play the game 'well', instances of such quality have been relatively commonplace.

Other times, a game can be 'great' because of its emotional intensity. As an Evertonian who followed the club avidly in the 1990s, I remember the narrow escapes from the jaws of death against Wimbledon in 1994 and Coventry City in 1998 as being great occasions. They weren't matches you'd want to go through again: they weren't enjoyable, and had the results gone differently, they would unquestionably have been awful games to attend. But the results went Everton's way, and so those attending got to sit through matches of incredible emotional intensity, where the future of the club was balanced on a knife edge. There was no trophy at stake, no title to claim, no terrace hero to lionise. But at the final whistle you knew you'd witnessed something momentous.

In putting these games together, it struck me that what you also have is something more than just a succession of snapshots (as illuminating as they can be). The story of Everton is revealed too.

The vast span of Evertonia is on show: from humble beginnings (when the St Domingo's church team first started kicking a ball around a park) to today, when Everton stand on the precipice of an historic move away from Goodison and the club's possible re-entry into the elite of English football. Through the games looked at, each one momentous in its own right, Everton's grand narrative is illustrated: the ups and downs, the highs and lows, the good times and the Mike Walker times.

We all have our favourites from this long history, and unquestionably some of yours might not be here. Notions of what constitutes a 'great' game are too subjective for a complete consensus to be achieved. Some of those I have loved and enjoyed didn't make the cut.

But these are my 50. You might not agree with all of them. But you can't deny they (mostly) show our club at its best.

UTFT



v Bolton Wanderers 2–1

19 November 1887

FA Cup First Round (Third Replay)

Anfield. Attendance: 8,000

Everton: Smalley, Dick, Dobson, Higgins, Gibson, Weir, Izatt, Farmer, Goudie, Watson, Briscoe

Bolton Wanderers: Unsworth, McKernan, Parkinson, Bullough, Steel, Roberts, Davenport, Brogan, Parkinson, Owen, Howarth

Referee: W. Stacey

In The Beginning

IN the winter of 1878, the parishioners of St Domingo's Methodist Church, a chapel in the district of Everton, first began kicking a ball around the local park, unaware of the momentous step they had just taken.

Back then, football was on the rise in England, particularly in Liverpool, which quickly became the epicentre of the late-Victorian football boom.

Links to local churches were not uncommon at the time. Of the 112 football clubs in the city, 25 had similar religious origins.

In its early days, this church team largely confined itself to exhibition matches against local parishes, which were described by Thomas Keates, an early biographer of Everton FC, as being played in 'a very crude character'. Think low-rent Sunday league, but with better moustaches and bigger shorts.

But, quickly, the team began to develop a reputation as one of the better footballing sides, and as local appetite for the sport grew, which it did exponentially in the 1870s and 1880s, more and more people were drawn to watch their games.

In an effort to extend inclusivity and capture this growing interest, a decision was made to change the club's name, and, in November 1879, Everton Football Club came into the world.

In the 1880s, this new club expanded rapidly. With a forward-thinking management committee, Everton understood the way in which football was changing. As the decade progressed, it was clear that amateurism, which had been the dominant model since the sport's emergence, was less able to yield success. What clubs who aimed high needed was paid professionals, and the best way to achieve the necessary income to provide this was to develop stadiums and bring in investment.

After a few years playing on Stanley Park and a financially unproductive season at Priory Road, in 1884 Everton were able to engineer a move to a field on Anfield Road, just outside the city's boundaries.

The move was hugely advantageous for the club. In return for unencumbered use, Everton merely had to keep the existing walls in good repair, pay

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the taxes, and either pay a small amount of rent or make a donation each year to the Stanley Hospital in the name of the owner, Mr Orrell.

Once they were ensconced in Anfield, the facilities were improved, capacity increased and Everton began to blossom financially – benefitting from rising attendances and gate receipts. They could now afford to compete at a higher level by bringing in those paid professionals.

Illustrative proof of how this benefitted the club was Everton's dominance of the Liverpool District Cup, which the club won three times in the mid-1880s. Everton were rapidly outpacing former peers, such as Earlestown and St Peter's.

But, as good as they were locally, the club still lacked national recognition. That was to change in the latter half of the 1880s. Everton's proto-professionalism and local dominance led them to compete in the FA Cup for the first time in 1886.

Disappointingly, the club's first taste of the competition was not a roaring success. They were drawn against Glasgow Rangers in the first round, and when the Scots arrived at Anfield the home side discovered that they had an ineligible player in their ranks and were compelled to forfeit the tie and play a friendly instead (which Everton lost 1–0).

After that inglorious beginning, Everton got a second bite the following year, when they were drawn against Bolton Wanderers in the opening round.

Bolton's relationship with Everton was an interesting one, representing a useful measure of the Anfield club's progress. Everton had played them a few times over the preceding decade and, after some hefty beatings early on, had gradually improved (for the most part) against what had traditionally been a better-organised and stronger club.

But, regardless of the improvement, Bolton were still widely seen as the favourites, and viewed their county compatriots as a lesser entity. Despite the fixtures that the two clubs had played against each other, Bolton had never deigned to invite Everton to their ground at Pikes Lane. It took the FA to make that happen.

The match captured the imagination of the local fans, and over 700 of them made the journey to Bolton on what was the first recorded football special excursion train ever to leave the city. It was a travelling mass that helped swell the attendance to around 5,000 people.

Frustratingly for those who had journeyed to support Everton, the game ended in defeat for the away side, a narrow 1–0 loss.

But salvation was at hand! The FA committee, having checked the home side's line-up, discovered that the Bolton executive had neglected to register one of their players in time for the contest, and therefore he was not eligible to play. The committee declared the game void and ordered it to be replayed at Anfield two weeks later.

In the Beginning: v Bolton Wanderers (2–1)

The return match, which was watched by a crowd of over 8,000 people, ended 2–2, with Everton's goals coming from Farmer and Watson. This draw meant a third game back at Pikes Lane a fortnight later. The closely fought encounter was now attracting the attention of the FA executive in London, who dispatched their president, Francis Marindin, to officiate.

Another draw, this time 1–1, meant a third replay back at Anfield. Cumulatively, nearly 20,000 people had witnessed these matches by this point. It was raising Everton's profile, not just for how long it was taking to settle the tie but also for how well they had played against opponents who were expected to comfortably beat them.

On a bright, sunny afternoon, 3,000 people (8,000 by half-time) lined up to watch this epic cup tie conclude.

Everton got quickly into their stride and were rewarded almost instantly. 'Izatt centred,' reported the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 'and to the increased delight of the Evertonians, Goudie drew first blood by a rattling shot. Great cheering resulted, as two minutes had scarcely elapsed from the start.'

The celebrating that followed the goal had barely dissipated when Everton got a second, as the *Post* continued:

'Another start from the middle of the field was made ... The ball was worked in front of the visitors' goal, and Watson was seen to let fly and bang went the ball past Unsworth, amidst tremendous cheering. Two goals in less than five minutes looked bad for the Wanderers.'

This breathtaking start rocked Bolton, and for a time they struggled to contain the rampant home forwards. But, frustratingly, Everton were unable to further their lead. As the half progressed, Bolton began to see more of the ball and on a few occasions could have pegged Everton back. As it was, no further goals arrived, and as the sides went in at half-time the scoreline remained 2–0.

In the second period, Bolton appeared better composed and gave the home side much more of a game. Although Everton were resolute in defence, Bolton kept applying the pressure. With a quarter of an hour to go, the breakthrough came when Davenport (from an offside position) smashed the ball past Smalley to get the visitors back into the tie.

Emboldened, Bolton laid siege to the Everton box. But, despite their efforts, that would be as good as it got for the Wanderers. Everton parked the bus for the remainder of the game and resolutely shut out any attempts to find an equaliser. In a hard-fought encounter, and hours of football, Everton had finally emerged victorious.

It had been the first time, in the brief history of the contest, that four games had been required to settle the issue of an FA Cup tie. Everton had made headlines.

But the club would go no further in that year's competition. In the next round, they were drawn against the mighty Preston North End, one of the

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strongest clubs in the country. On this occasion the favourites triumphed, beating Everton 6–0.

Not that the scoreline mattered anyway. Even if the men from Anfield had won, it wouldn't have counted, as the club was soon under investigation for its own irregularities.

Perhaps disgruntled at their loss, still angry at Everton's complaints regarding player eligibility or irritated that their journey home from Anfield had been marred when their horse-drawn carriage had careered out of control, leading several players to jump for safety, Bolton questioned the legality of the Everton side, arguing that there were irregularities with the registration process.

The FA investigated and ruled in favour of Bolton. Everton were suspended from the competition and Bolton reinstated. For their efforts, they were then satisfyingly battered 9–1 by their Lancashire rivals Preston.

Although Everton's FA Cup 'run' that year ended ingloriously, they had still caused headlines and made others sit up and take notice of what was happening at Anfield. Not only had the club held and then beaten one of the strongest sides in the country, they'd also consistently drawn in sizeable crowds. The four games had been watched by tens of thousands of spectators, the largest cumulative crowd to watch two sides compete in the competition to date.

As football began to develop further, and the idea of a national league gathered supporters, being a competent side that could attract thousands through the gate began to matter. Everton were getting it right just when it mattered most.