

THE GREAT DAYS OF **SUNDERLAND**

Six League Titles and Two FA Cups

David Potter



**THE GREAT DAYS OF
SUNDERLAND**

Six League Titles and Two FA Cups

David Potter



Contents

Introduction.	7
League Champions 1891/92	12
League Champions 1892/93	53
League Champions 1894/95	95
League Champions 1901/02	139
League Champions 1912/13	178
League Champions 1935/36	221
FA Cup Winners 1936/37	265
FA Cup Winners 1972/73	309

League Champions 1891/92

THE FOOTBALL League was formed in 1888, and Sunderland were elected to join at the AGM in May 1890. Thus they played their first season in the competition in 1890/91 and achieved only moderate success that year, the title being won by Everton, having been won by Preston North End in the first two seasons of its existence.

The league (a fairly revolutionary idea whereby every team played each other twice, home and away for points) was centred in Lancashire and the Midlands. Sunderland were clearly the geographical outsiders, and there had been doubts about whether it was wise to include them, but their acceptance was probably due to several reasons. One was that they were good, already referred to as 'the team of all the talents'; another reason was that they were well supported and they could bring a certain amount of finance; and further was

the political one that the Football League wanted to be seen as the 'English' league, rather than just a local one. They had not yet made any overtures to southern clubs, but it was good to have a northern club, particularly one full of Scotsmen. Perhaps one day, they might even be called 'The British League'.

Rail links to Sunderland were good, and there was a certain excitement, even a bit of missionary zeal, as the clubs decided to welcome the Wearsiders, and to enjoy the chance to see the north of the country. Sunderland for their part took the opportunity to represent the north-east. They were one step ahead of teams like Newcastle East End and Middlesbrough Ironopolis in this respect.

Replacing Stoke, who had transferred their allegiances to another organisation called the Football Alliance, Sunderland performed creditably in 1890/91, finishing seventh, but suffering the embarrassing experience of having two points deducted for fielding an ineligible player. Everton were the champions, Sunderland's jousts with them ending up 1-0 for the home team on both occasions. It was in every sense a learning experience for Sunderland.

As in every summer, there were changes in 1891 as far as the Football League was concerned. The number of clubs was increased from 12 to 14. The bottom four clubs – Accrington, Aston Villa, Derby

County and West Bromwich Albion – were all re-elected, and they were joined by Darwen and Stoke, Stoke having thought better of their dalliance with the Football Alliance. Two of the teams who were not admitted were Newton Heath (who in later years would become Manchester United but no one seemed to think they were a viable concern in 1891), and Sunderland Albion who earned only one vote, presumably that of Sunderland Association Football Club, the organisation that we are primarily concerned with.

Thus the 14 teams in 1891/92 were seven from Lancashire: Preston North End, Burnley, Blackburn Rovers, Accrington, Everton, Darwen and Bolton Wanderers; six from the Midlands: Aston Villa, West Bromwich Albion, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Notts County, Derby County and Stoke; and one from the north-east in Sunderland. There were moves afoot to form a Second Division as well, but as yet there was nothing from the London area. Those who objected to the inclusion of Sunderland on the grounds that they were too distant would find there was an added reason to be unhappy, for Sunderland won the league that year.

Sunderland's squad for 1891/92 consisted of 17 players, only three of whom were Englishmen, the rest having come from Scotland in search of professional wages. Theoretically at least Scotland was all amateur, although it was a rule honoured more in its breach than

its observance – and sometimes blatantly so. But in England professionalism was all legal and above board, even though there was a certain horror in some parts of polite society about the idea of people earning their living by playing sport.

Their Englishmen were Tom Porteous, John Oliver and David Hannah, while Scotland supplied Ned Doig (the goalkeeper from Arbroath), John Murray, John Auld, Donald Gow (recently signed from Rangers), Willie Gibson, James Hannah, John Harvey, Hugh Wilson, John Smith, Jimmy Millar, Jimmy Logan, Jimmy Gillespie, John Campbell (the prolific goalscorer) and Johnny Scott. Doig was quite a character. Born in Letham near Forfar in 1866 and christened Edward Doig, he was sometimes referred to as Ed, Jed or Ted, but most often as Ned. He has a great claim to be looked upon as the best Sunderland player of all time.

The person in charge was a local man called Tom Watson. He would be destined to have a great managerial career and this was the start of it. One is wary of using the word ‘manager’ in the context of the 1890s; the role was nothing like that of our 21st-century concept of *supremo*. In theory he was little more than a ‘match secretary’ with no authority over team selection, for example. But he would of course advise the committee and the directors, and he could,

without seeming to choose the team and decide tactics as well. Watson did that, and with conspicuous success.

Sunderland's 1891/92 season opened with a home game at Newcastle Road against Wolverhampton Wanderers on Saturday, 5 September. The *Sunderland Daily Echo* was optimistic and upbeat about the new season, and told readers that there would be about 100 junior teams in the area starting their season, as well, such was the passion for this game. The visitors arrived on the Friday night along with a few supporters (following one's team to away fixtures was an increasing habit in the 1890s, albeit confined to the more affluent) and jokes were made about packs of 'wolves' hanging about the centre of the town, with even a reference in the singular about a local girl being paid attention to and courted by a charming 'wolf'. There were three new Sunderland players – James Logan, Donald Gow and James Hannah – for the season. Hannah was already well known, for he had played for Sunderland Albion, but the other two were Scottish and needed some introduction.

The reporter for the *Sunderland Daily Echo* was very impressed with Logan, who was 'fine, able-bodied ... single and very abstemious in his habits'. 'Abstemiousness' or the abstention from alcohol was a great (and rare) habit to possess in Victorian society, for drink was a terrible problem. He was also very affable,

lived in 'diggings' in Zetland Street, Monkwearmouth, and was only 22 years old. He came from Troon in Ayrshire, a county which 'not only gave a poet to Scotland, but was the nursery of some of the very best of players now before the public' and already loved Sunderland and the area. Gow, from Blair Athol in Perthshire, was slightly more experienced having played for Rangers, who shared the inaugural Scottish championship with Dumbarton in 1891. He had also developed a liking for Sunderland, but had been unwell recently and was expected to be unavailable for the opening fixtures. In the event, Logan didn't play in the first game either.

Sunderland's team in the 5-2 defeat of Wolves was Doig, Porteous, Oliver, Murray, Auld, Gibson, Smith, Millar, Campbell, Scott and Hannah. It was 2-2 at half-time, but Sunderland really turned on the style and after Millar scored the fifth goal just before full time 'the enthusiasm of the crowd now knew no bounds and a perfect din prevailed until the referee blew the final whistle'. Millar had scored a hat-trick and Campbell the other two. It was a good start to the season in reasonable weather.

But then came a stumble. Three in fact. The first was at the famous ground of Deepdale, home of Preston North End, the club who had won the Football League in the first two years of its existence in 1889

and 1890 (and the FA Cup into the bargain in 1889) and were generally known as 'Proud Preston'. It was a game that many looked forward to, even though North End had not started the season well. They had never yet defeated Sunderland at Deepdale and it was a much-anticipated event.

Sunderland travelled down to Lancashire on the Friday night, spent the night in a hotel and then on Saturday morning visited the ground (for the first time in the case of many of their players) and then had a walk around the town, followed by quite a few of the locals who had been told who they were. Being football players they were instantly recognised by being better dressed than most and by their athletic appearance. It was all good-natured stuff, though, and the players were under orders to talk to fans, even those who were supporting the other side.

A crowd of 7,000 – a huge attendance for this infant game of football – appeared at Deepdale for a game which the *Echo* told us was played on a day 'totally unfit for football'. And why was that? The afternoon was 'brilliantly fine' and 'without a breath of air', and the reporter clearly believed that football was meant to be played in worse conditions than this, and that they should still have been playing cricket. Indeed, that very day, Sunderland Cricket Club were in action, losing to Norton – a result that meant

Norton were the champions of the Durham County Cricket League.

The report of the game also made an astonishing gaffe when it gave the final score as Preston North End 3 Sunderland 4. This seems to be a bit of wishful thinking (later analysts would talk about a Freudian slip) for the report made it plain that Preston won 3-1. It is a sad fact about Victorian sports reporting that mistakes were frequent, for proofreading was a science very much in its infancy, and once the reporter filed his report and gave it to the compositor it was not really looked at much before it appeared on the streets.

Sunderland fielded the same team as had won against Wolves the previous week, their only goal coming before half-time. Millar was the scorer 'when a scrimmage was in progress' but he did not have a good game overall. Doig was singled out for his fine goalkeeping near the end, and the game was described as 'splendid' with *Athletic News* of the view that it would be good to see a team 'equal to Sunderland' at Deepdale every Saturday.

As the team returned north that evening, the atmosphere was still upbeat. A defeat to the famous Preston team was not exactly a huge disaster. Excuses could be made – the heat was excessive, the opposition were generally agreed to be one of the best in England – and in any case, it might be an idea

to try out some other players, particularly the new ones, when Sunderland went back to Lancashire the following week to play Bolton Wanderers. Besides, the team hadn't really played badly, and it was early days yet.

It was a slightly changed side chosen for the trip to Bolton. They met at the Central Station at 1.30pm on the Friday, being booked in to the Douglas Hotel, Manchester. The fact that the *Sunderland Daily Echo* reported this meant that there was a fairly large crowd of well-wishers to see them off; the main emotion of the crowd, one imagines, would have been sheer jealousy and envy at the lot of a professional football player who was able to travel on trains and to stay in hotels. Although the life of a footballer was as precarious in 1891 as it is now with the constant risk of injury and the fear of losing your job after a bad run of form, nevertheless it was better than working down the mines or in the shipyards.

A team of Doig, Porteous, Gow, Wilson, Auld, Murray, Smith, Millar, Campbell, Hannah and Scott took the field at Pike Lane to take on the 'Trotters', as Bolton Wanderers were called. Bolton, a cotton manufacturing town and in 1891 reasonably prosperous, had already developed a love of football, and the Wearsiders were given a good reception by the non-partisan locals.

It was, of course, long before the days in which supporters could travel in any great numbers to watch their team in away games, but one of the great advances of the early 1890s had been the telegraph system which meant that a report of the game could be sent almost immediately to the office of the *Sunderland Daily Echo* which duly produced its evening 'pink' edition, and had it on the streets promptly, on sale at the usual points of outside the railway station, theatres and music halls, and although newspaper vendors were sometimes discouraged from entering public houses, they nevertheless did so, selling their papers for a penny to the avid readers. Thus shortly after the 'pink' was issued at 7.15pm, most people knew that Sunderland had sustained another defeat in Lancashire when going down 4-3 to Bolton.

It was generally agreed that Sunderland had had bad luck. They scored first and last in the first half, but conceded four in between to make it 4-2 for Bolton at half-time. The pace was fierce but slowed in the second half, the only addition to the score coming from a penalty by Hugh Wilson. The first-half goals had been scored by Johnny Campbell and Jimmy Millar. But it was a dispirited bunch of Mackems who made their way home from Lancashire. There was another away fixture to come the following week as well.

This one was at Aston Villa, the famous team from Birmingham who had already won the FA Cup in 1887 and were generally regarded as one of the best around. They played at a stadium called Perry Barr, and had arranged this game for Monday, 28 September to take advantage of a large crowd likely to assemble on a local holiday. Meanwhile, Sunderland played on the Saturday against Newcastle East End, for there was as yet no Newcastle United, although things were certainly moving in that direction with rumours of secret talks between the directors of the city's West End and East End clubs.

The crowd at Perry Barr was a large one of 10,000, and the weather was good, but they saw a very poor performance from Sunderland who were 4-2 down at half-time and although they rallied a little in the second half, they still lost 5-3. It was agreed to have been a good game, and Sunderland earned a little praise for their performance, but this now meant that they had lost three away matches in a row, admittedly against possibly the three toughest teams in the league. It did not look like championship-winning form, and yet no one could say that they were playing badly, and as the wiser supporters would say, 'There is a long way to go yet.'

Had this happened in the 21st century, of course, there would have been cries of 'sack the manager' and

the TV stations and newspapers would have dug up ex-players and gnarled journalists to say what exactly was wrong at Newcastle Road. In the 1890s there was a resigned acceptance of what was happening, and wishes that things would improve. Tom Watson was aware that things could be better, but went around telling everyone that the three fixtures lost were all away from home, and that the team did not really play all that badly.

The rot was stopped on 3 October when Everton, the defending champions, came to town. Both teams had played friendlies against Scottish opposition in the previous midweek. Sunderland had lost 4-2 at Newcastle Road to Queen's Park (the club who refused to join the Scottish league because they feared it would lead to professionalism becoming legalised) whereas Everton were on their way back home, as it were, from Glasgow where 'in slashing form', they had defeated Rangers 4-1. They arrived in the north-east on the Friday and, clearly aware of the nuances of local rivalry, trained at the ground of Newcastle East End at Heaton, rather than anywhere in Sunderland.

Sunderland's team was Doig, Porteous, Gow, Murray, Auld, Gibson, James Hannah, Smith, Campbell, Scott and David Hannah. James Hannah was given his debut. He would very soon become a favourite of the Sunderland crowd, earning the nickname of

‘Blood’, presumably bestowed as a compliment for his whole-hearted approach to the game.

The weather was once again favourable, and about 8,000 fans appeared to see the tussle. It was a tough game, with Everton’s centre-forward Fred Geary being injured several times (the local press reports did not say so, but one assumes because of a few hard tackles) and the home side eased home 2-1. The first goal came from Campbell and the second one was described quaintly – albeit obscurely – by the *Sunderland Daily Echo* in the following terms, ‘The outcome of a fierce onslaught, the ball went past Jardine [Everton’s goalkeeper] and number two was chalked up for Sunderland amid tremendous enthusiasm which broke forth afresh when, after some little demur by Everton, the ball was taken to the centre and restarted by Geary, a sign that they had conceded the point.’ Other highlights included an invasion by ‘the inevitable dog which caused some amusement until recalled by its owner’. Geary was eventually taken off late in the game after he came off second best in a shoulder-charging joust with Ned Doig, and Sunderland finished narrow but deserved winners.

The defeat of the champions was a cause for celebration and from now on, Sunderland’s season took off, just as the days began to get shorter and the weather began to deteriorate. The following Saturday

saw a friendly against Middlesbrough – a good 4-1 win over opposition that were ‘not of the strongest’ – and then came the next two league encounters, a double-header with West Bromwich Albion starting at their Stoney Lane ground on 17 October and at Newcastle Road seven days later. Both games were comfortable victories, 5-2 and 4-0.

The away fixture was played in poor weather of wind and rain, and West Brom, playing with the benefit of such conditions, led 2-1 at half-time, but Sunderland turned things around brilliantly after the changeover and won 5-2 with two goals from John ‘Jock’ Scott, two from Johnny Campbell and one from Jimmy Millar. The success, and the impressive form, was repeated the following week when Campbell scored three and Hugh Wilson scored the fourth with a penalty, something that was still unusual in football, for it had only been introduced recently. The crowd of 7,000 left Newcastle Road that afternoon very pleased with what they had seen. The ‘Throstles’ had no reply to offer and the *Sunderland Daily Echo* was pleased to say that the result had been Sunderland’s best performance of the season so far.

A week later on Hallowe’en, when Sunderland beat Accrington 4-1 in another fine performance, the press described their fans as ‘on thoroughly good terms with themselves and the players’ as they left the ground,

having seen some fine goals, and their newspapers over the rest of the weekend were able to tell them that their team had now climbed to fifth in the league, having been at the bottom after their three successive defeats in September.

The first week in November saw 'another spoke in the wheel of the Sunderland train' (as it was well described by the local press), which came at Ewood Park, the ground of Blackburn Rovers, one of the truly great teams of the Victorian era. Blackburn had slipped a little of late but they were still the FA Cup holders for the past two years, having won it five times in all. Sunderland travelled to Lancashire without Donald Gow who had stayed behind with an injured ankle, and conceded a goal within the first 30 seconds.

This need not, of course, have proved to be fatal, and Sunderland did indeed fight back, but they still lost 3-1 in a good game. Still, there was no shame in losing to Blackburn with Campbell in particular having hard luck on several occasions. Goalkeeper Doig was also a busy man but for some reason fortune was with Blackburn. Sunderland, however, were far from despondent, and from now on they rallied and went on a glorious unbeaten run which became the talk of the British Isles.

It all started when Derby County visited Newcastle Road on 14 November. As was often the case in

Victorian times, the two teams, along with Sunderland Albion who were playing an exhibition match against a Canadian side, were given free tickets to the theatre on the Friday night, in this case the People's Palace, where they were applauded as they took their seats before the show.

The Saturday was a dull, dry and windless day at Newcastle Road and Derby won the toss to choose to defend 'the lower end' of the ground. The referee was given a strange description in the *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 'A favourite referee with Sunderland spectators as shown by his cordial reception never granted to his predecessors.' Whether this was the reporter being sarcastic or not, we cannot say, but the referee was Fitzroy Norris of Bolton, and presumably a well-known and frequent visitor to the ground.

Sunderland fielded Doig, Porteous, Murray, Wilson, Auld, Gibson, Hannah, Smith, Campbell, Scott and Millar. Derby were a reasonable team with one or two internationals, but they were simply swept aside by a rampant Sunderland, clearly hurting after that defeat at Blackburn. The score was 5-0 at half-time with some extra entertainment supplied by Jimmy Millar who at one stage ripped his pants, and had to retire to have them repaired lest he offend Victorian sensibilities, for there were some (albeit, admittedly, only a few) ladies in attendance.