



Never
Give
Up

The
Graham
Buster
Tutt *Story*

GRAHAM TUTT *with* MATT EASTLEY

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Foreword

by John Motson

LIKE GRAHAM Tutt himself, I also distinctly recall Saturday, 21 February 1976. Roker Park was like a cauldron that day for the match between Sunderland and Charlton Athletic, two great old clubs with fine traditions. It was my fifth season working for the BBC and I'd already seen a lot but the events of that day have always stayed with me. The devastating injury which ended Graham's career in this country came very early in the game which is always challenging for a commentator. He was highly rated in the game and who knows what he may have gone on to achieve. I'm able to replay the moment the injury happened in my mind. The lob from Tony Towers, the header from Joe Bolton and the ball breaking free. I saw Graham rushing out and then ... the terrible collision with Sunderland's Tom Finney. It happened so quickly and looked like excellent goalkeeping which is why I said on the commentary that day, 'Good save by Tutt who got the bang on the head. What a brave piece of goalkeeping that was.' The next thing I knew was that Graham was being carried off and, on my monitor, I could see the blood pouring from a wound. It was obvious then he would take no further part that

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afternoon but what nobody realised was that he would not play another professional game in this country.

I was obviously concerned for Graham's welfare that day and can recall being anxious that he had gone to hospital. I followed reports in the newspapers and was relieved that he made a recovery of sorts.

What I didn't know was what happened next and it is only since being asked to write this foreword that I have found out. I am delighted that Graham has gone on to live such an interesting and varied life. This is a unique story which spans three continents and provides a fascinating insight into the life of a professional footballer, not just in Britain, but in South Africa and the United States. Graham's experiences in each country make compelling reading. Perhaps none of it would have happened were it not for the incident at Roker Park on that chilly February afternoon. There are life lessons for all of us in the book and the title 'Never Give Up' is very apt indeed.

The story also has a really happy ending with a fascinating reunion but you'll have to read the book to find out what that is.

PART ONE

**LONDON
AND THE UK**

Chapter 1

The Boot

EVERYBODY SAID I shouldn't have returned, even though the place had been silently luring me back for years. While my head told me they were right, my heart protested. I felt I had to. Closure, they call it. To eradicate the dull ache in the pit of my stomach that wouldn't shift. Nevertheless, I was here; the street names gave it away even though houses now stood where the football ground had once been. Clockstand Close, Midfield Drive, Turnstile Mews. They were my compass and map.

Otherwise, I never would have known that the regulation houses on this identikit estate in the north-east of England rested at the scene of the terrible moment my life changed forever.

It was quiet when I returned, save for the occasional shout of children playing on their bikes. I could feel the chill wind blowing in from the North Sea, like razor blades on my cheeks. I live in another country now, a much warmer one, but it reminded me of how cold England could be in winter, taking me back to my childhood. The bracing sea air kick-started my memory and, like fragments of a half-remembered dream, took me back to that fateful day more than 40 years ago.

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I closed my eyes and saw throngs of people heading to a famous old football ground. Red and white scarves, donkey jackets, trench coats and parkas. I could smell the tobacco and beer in the late winter air, the waft of frying onions, burgers and hot dogs and hear the distinctive brogue of England's industrial north-east.

You see, I'm a lot older now. But I used to be a professional footballer and I had returned to the site of Roker Park, the former home of Sunderland Football Club. I never played for this great old club, but I will always have a connection with it. For the life of me, with no disrespect whatsoever to their brilliant followers, I wish I didn't have.

Because it was here that my soccer career finished prematurely. Suddenly, shockingly and in a pool of blood.

As I stood there, so many years on, quietly absorbing my surroundings, I felt a lump in my throat and my eyes filling with tears – the physical manifestations of a gnawing sense of injustice about what might have been.

I dug my hands – my big goalkeeper hands – into my pockets and, with the stoicism for which my countrymen are renowned, stole one final look. Where *exactly* had it happened, I wondered? Could I work out where that penalty box had been? I moved hesitantly towards the spot. There had been nothing hesitant about my actions on that other chilly afternoon. On the contrary, I had been bold and decisive. Because that was the way I had played. No half measures. It was what I had been paid to do.

As I reached the imagined spot, I stopped in my tracks. And then I saw it. The boot. *That* boot. The one that did the damage. I could see it coming towards me, almost frozen in time. It had taken on hideous proportions in my memory. It was just a standard

THE BOOT

boot but it had wrought so much damage, both physically and emotionally. I felt another freezing gust blow in from the bleak coast and I knew I had seen enough. I had returned, which was all I needed to do. It had been upsetting, yet cathartic. I turned to leave this old proud city which had unwittingly played a part in my fate.

I decided there and then I would never return.

Before I left for good, I stopped briefly outside Sunderland's fantastic stadium – the Stadium of Light, constructed around the turn of the Millennium just a stone's throw from Roker Park.

While I admired its imposing presence and modern grandeur, something grated. It felt alien. Perhaps it represented how far the sport I loved had come since my world fell apart. It symbolised the new. And I wasn't part of it. As I headed back towards the station, I saw it again. The boot.