

# OUT OF THE SHADOWS

The Story of the 1982  
England World Cup Team



Gary Jordan

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## Prologue

# Race Against Time

**I**T was a decision that was born out of pure desperation and frustration. The more annoying fact that in hindsight the whole episode could've been avoided.

Kevin Keegan was the poster boy of the England team. His flowing black perm made him instantly recognisable, and his boyish grin would light up a room. He epitomised everything that was English football. A fierce competitor on the field for both club and country, but a fun-loving, family man off it. He was modest enough to know that even though his place in the starting eleven each week was crucial to his team's success, each game could also be his last, such is the nature of the game. Keegan was fortunate enough not to be labelled as injury-prone, therefore his playing career was a long and fruitful one. Having paid his dues with Scunthorpe United, he was scouted well by Liverpool and this is where he made his name globally, before a switch to Hamburg in Germany in 1977. He made his international debut in November 1972, a 1-0 win against Wales, but wasn't a regular feature until 1974 when Don Revie started to see the influence he could have on the team and started to build around him.

However, England were in a transitional phase after the departure of 1966 World Cup-winning manager Sir Alf Ramsey, and failed to qualify for both the 1974 and 1978 World Cup finals in West Germany and Argentina respectively. This meant that the 1982 finals in Spain were to realistically be the last chance Keegan would have at playing on the grandest stage. Having helped drag his team, and manager, through a dark and troubled qualification, that stage was now set.

Five days before England's first game in a World Cup finals tournament for twelve years, Keegan had a huge problem. His back had troubled him somewhat in the past and had side-lined him on occasion. Sometimes he played through the minor discomfort it would cause. This time though it was to flare up enough that he could barely move, to the point that even standing up would mean excruciating pain. There was no chance of him recovering in time to face France, and with group games against Czechoslovakia and Kuwait due in the coming days, all of a sudden Keegan's world, and indeed World Cup, had turned upside down.

He called a meeting with team doctor Vernon Edwards and manager Ron Greenwood. Keegan had a plan, although there was an element of risk involved. When this injury was at its worst before, he was playing in Germany for Hamburg and saw a specialist who had put this severe pain down to his constant heading of the ball. Although not that tall, 5ft 8in, he was often the man who would be used at set pieces for flick-ons. Add this on top of his usual amount of heading activity as a dynamic attacking midfielder. This repetitive strain had caused four vertebrae to fall out of place. Keegan tried his best to assure Dr Edwards that the specialist Jürgen Rehwinkel could perform a minor miracle by popping the displaced joints back into place and he'd be back in full training within three days. Greenwood wasn't sure, so he asked Edwards for his opinion. The diagnosis was one that had Keegan fuming; he couldn't believe that the

team doctor would order him to have an epidural for what he thought was simply a knotting of some muscles.

Ever the team player, Keegan went along with this charade knowing full well that it was not the cure. It was a simple enough procedure, and low key enough to keep the media off the scent of a front-page headline. Suffering the ridicule of his teammates when they found out that he had had an epidural, and subsequently pumped full of drugs to help and ease the recovery, but it was becoming clear the treatment wasn't working. Days were being wasted. The clock was ticking not just on Keegan's World Cup, but possibly the fortunes of the entire team.

It was time to take action.

Keegan was now desperate and had to roll the dice. The tournament was progressing into its latter stages and England were still involved, so it was now getting to crunch time. A matter of minds again as Keegan approached his manager with not so much an ultimatum, more a statement of the facts as he saw them. With the team entering the second phase of games it was a time for clear heads and minds. The last thing the players needed was to be worried about their teammate and whether he was going to come into the team and disrupt the harmony they were starting to create without him, although some would say a half-fit Keegan would do a good enough job. With this in mind he suggested to Greenwood that he should either go home and take away any unneeded distraction, even though it would clearly be banner headlines across all the media outlets, or make the maddest 2,300-mile round trip to see Mr. Rehwinkel and his healing hands so he could salvage something personally from his World Cup, and in doing so give the team a boost as it headed towards a possible best overseas World Cup the country had witnessed.

For Greenwood, it was to be the biggest choice to date of his time in charge of the England team. It wasn't a case of going against his staff; after all they had tried that path and

it was a dead end. The team could do with a shot in the arm and Greenwood could deliver that by bringing a fit and healthy Keegan back into the fold. It was this thought that swung the pendulum towards letting Keegan go. The one thing that was put in place was that no one, apart from a very select few, not even a handful of people, would know about this mission to get Keegan away from the team's base and over the border into northern West Germany.

It was a race against time, a mission impossible that had equal risk and reward. For Kevin Keegan, it was the only way he was going to play in a World Cup game. The mission had to succeed.

# Chapter 1

## Failing Empire

### Part 1 – Fall of a Legend

SUNDAY 14 June 1970. Time was slowly winding down on another energy-sapping match between two old foes. A game that kicked off under the midday sun in Mexico's Estadio Guanajuato in Leon, had all the drama of the one that was played out in late July four years earlier. Famously that time, England had prevailed over West Germany under the iconic Twin Towers of Wembley Stadium; this time, however, was not going to be their day.

Having fought back from a two-goal deficit, the West German side had taken the game into extra time and were in no mood to lose this World Cup tie. It was the quarter-final this time around so no trophy was awaiting the winners on this occasion, but that made it no less important for a German side that were in great form, having scored ten goals in the group stages, and they were certainly one of the tournaments in-form teams, and needed to avenge the loss from four years previously.

So, it was in the 108th minute that winger Jürgen Grabowski moved past a tiring Terry Cooper with ease and sent a deep, high



cross over from the right side. Hannes Lohr rose higher than Keith Newton at the far post, and a stationary Brian Labone could only watch as the ball looped agonisingly back over him and into the path of the diminutive and prolific goalscoring figure of Gerd Muller who leapt to volley home from four yards beyond a despairing Peter Bonetti. England piled forward in the remaining minutes but were limited to long-range efforts, and when the final whistle blew, the largely pro-West German crowd celebrated as if it was the cup final itself.

For manager Alf Ramsey, it was the beginning of a downward spiral. The man who had led England to the top of the footballing world just four years previously, was starting to be questioned over his tactics. He was harangued by the media over the double substitution of Bobby Charlton and Martin Peters while leading 2-0 in the loss to West Germany, and indeed if it wasn't for the unfortunate and maligned Bonetti who was a last-minute replacement for a bug-ridden Gordon Banks, the spotlight would have fallen squarely onto Ramsey and his negative tactics with the game firmly in their grasp.

Bobby Charlton, who was a little bemused by his substitution during the game, later went on record to say that he felt the fittest he'd been during the entire trip, 'The lads back Alf Ramsey and his judgement has given us no reason to doubt it now. He might have made a mistake that he later regrets, but he'd probably do the same again,' he said when quizzed about him being taken off at what proved to be the turning point of the game.

In a scheduled press conference Alf Ramsey, who for the most part when conducting interviews was very cutting and good for a soundbite, finally lost his cool with the collected media. 'I'm rude! Yet I'm treated with rudeness. They stick these things in front of me [microphones] and what have you and so forth, and I'm being rude. I don't think there's been a word invented that describes the mannerisms of some of the people that I've been confronted with, and yet I'm rude.'

England needed to pick themselves up quickly and Ramsey knew that at the very least he had to navigate through the qualifying group stage of the 1972 European Championships. Given, on paper at least, a favourable draw with Malta, Greece and Switzerland, a safe passage was very likely. A single Peters goal away from home in Malta wasn't the most convincing of starts to the campaign and with the Swiss winning their opening three games the unthinkable was starting to creep into some minds. These thoughts were allayed with two wins in three weeks at Wembley, a 3-0 win over Greece and a 5-0 thumping of Malta, the latter played in front of just over 41,500. Switzerland still topped the group going into the two games between the teams in the autumn of 1971.

The core of the 1966 team was still very much at the heart of Ramsey's plans and his faith was restored in the opening minute of a topsy-turvy game in Basle. Geoff Hurst opened the scoring after just 55 seconds with a diving header that beat goalkeeper Marcel Kunz low to the left of the goal. After being pegged back quickly, England went ahead again after just 12 minutes through a Martin Chivers effort. Once more the Swiss didn't go away easily and levelled just before the break. The decisive moment and one that put qualification back in England's favour came just ten minutes from time. Chivers got away on the right of the area and crossed hard to see hapless Swiss defender Anton Weibel deflect the ball in and gift Ramsey's men a valuable win. The return game at Wembley a month later was just as hard fought if a little less dramatic. Mike Summerbee put England ahead inside ten minutes with a powerful header, only to see the Swiss fight back again and captain Karl Odermatt fired in a shot from just outside the area and Peter Shilton, who was now sharing goalkeeping duties with Gordon Banks, couldn't keep the ball out despite getting two hands to the ball. As the game wore on the visitors were getting more confident and were posing more of a threat to get the winning goal; thankfully

though they couldn't find the breakthrough and the 90,000-plus in attendance cheered at the final whistle more through relief than of a performance that merited a team on the verge of emerging as group winners.

It would've taken a collapse of monumental proportions for England not to qualify, and they avoided this by beating Greece in Athens with two second half goals. The draw for the quarter-finals was made and it was perhaps inevitable they would only find themselves up against West Germany in a two-legged affair. A chance of redemption doesn't often come around so quickly in major tournaments, and it was decided that given the England players had not been together since that qualifier in Greece almost five months before that the squad were to be brought together on the Monday before the weekend first leg clash for a training session at Wembley. Six players were in the starting line-up from the 1970 World Cup defeat, including the two strikers Hurst and Peters who were coming to the end of their international careers.

Francis Lee was on hand with just over ten minutes left to tap in after Josef Maier spilled a Colin Bell effort to cancel out a first-half goal from Uli Hoeness, and the game looked to be heading to a stalemate with the second leg due in a fortnight's time. However, disaster struck late on as a controversial penalty was awarded; the foul looked to be outside of the box, and even though Banks got a hand to the ball he couldn't deny Gunter Netzer putting the Germans ahead with just five minutes left on the clock. Worse was still to come as Hoeness evaded would-be tacklers, skipped across the edge of the English penalty area from the right, slipped the ball to willing predator Muller who slammed the ball home and put the match, and the tie, to bed.

The return match ended goalless in Berlin and more pressure was heaped upon Ramsey. In the space of six years he had gone from having the world at his feet to failing to back up that historic day in July 1966, with some large cracks appearing in

his armour. He was being accused of being too slow to adjust to the way the game was changing around him, and only through public and media pressure was he willing to bend his style somewhat to bring in the new talent that the English game was seeing on a weekly basis. The lean years after the World Cup exit in Mexico saw debuts for the likes of Malcolm Macdonald, Tony Currie and Rodney Marsh, although the latter had a very short-lived international career due to his relaxed attitude not being ideal to Ramsey's stiff views. Fresh, exciting and naturally gifted players were needed and they could bring a much-needed shot in the arm to an otherwise ageing and rigid England backbone.

There would be no papering over those deepening and widening cracks, and what looked like a relatively straightforward qualification group was to prove Ramsey's undoing. The draw was kind with Wales and Poland in a triangular race to the 1974 World Cup in none other than West Germany. After a win and a draw against Wales, what followed was a humbling 2-0 defeat in Warsaw against Poland, a game that proved to be captain Bobby Moore's last meaningful international as he was at fault for both goals and subsequently dropped for the return match. Poland were clearly no fluke and were in fact the current Olympic tournament champions, and they marched on buoyed from this win and topped the group with another impressive performance in a 3-0 win against the Welsh. This meant that England had to beat Poland at Wembley to book a place at the finals in West Germany.

To say Ramsey was stubborn in his approach to this game would be an understatement. Under constant criticism for his tried and tested 4-3-3 formation, he chose to stick with this despite seeing Poland suffer in a friendly game just weeks before this critical qualifier by their opponents' use of wingers. It did, however, seem that goals were in the team as they went with three very assured strikers in Mick Channon, Allan Clarke and Martin Chivers.

In front of a full to bursting Wembley crowd the Polish tactics seemed simple – defend at all costs. They weren't dirty in their style but they did frustrate, and wave after wave of England attacks were soaked up. Their goal led a charmed life with the woodwork struck twice and several goalbound efforts cleared off the line. The mere fact that the Poles scored against the run of play seemed to sum up the whole night. An error of judgement in the 57th minute by the usual no-nonsense Norman Hunter allowed Grzegorz Lato to race away on the left, he drove forward and squared the ball to Jan Domarski who saw his first time shot go under Shilton.

Complete despair and shock silenced Wembley. 'It was so silent that I heard the whoops of joy from the Polish players,' Shilton reflected. The Polish goal, which was living a charmed life, was to finally be breached. Shortly after Channon had a goal disallowed, Clarke had the opportunity to equalise from the spot after Peters was adjudged to have been fouled when racing into the right side of the area. With still over 20 minutes to play Clarke held his nerve and planted the ball high into the right corner of the net. For goalkeeper Jan Tomaszewski, famously called 'a clown' by Brian Clough, it was the only time he had to pick the ball out of his goal. He had thwarted the English attack time and again using near enough every part of his body in doing so.

England were out.

'I think in life one has many disappointments. The players played so well and have nothing to show for it. In both matches against Poland, England have been the better team, but we just didn't have the luck, and we certainly did not take our chances,' was the reaction from Ramsey after the game on television. 'You have seen a great team performance by England. I do not think they could have played any better.' And finally, when he was put on the spot about his future as England boss: 'I have to work to live. My life is in football.'

This was the first time England had failed to reach a World Cup finals tournament. Under increasing pressure from both the public and people within the game, Ramsey would preside over just two more friendly games, England failing to score in either contest. It was then that the Football Association, after almost a decade and 113 games in charge, that the man who had put England on top of the world was relieved of his position.

‘Following meetings, a unanimous recommendation was submitted to the executive committee that Sir Alf Ramsey should be replaced as England team manager. This recommendation was accepted unanimously by the executive committee. The Football Association wishes at this time to record its deep appreciation for all that Sir Alf Ramsey has accomplished, and the debt owed to him by English football for his unbending loyalty and dedication, and the high level of integrity he’s brought to world football.’ – Official FA statement on the sacking of Sir Alf Ramsey.

## **Part 2 – Failed Resurrection**

Without a firm hand on the rudder, England had to steer clear of troubled waters while they looked for a permanent replacement for someone who, for a time, was deemed irreplaceable. When Joe Mercer was appointed in a caretaker capacity it was very much a case of rip it up and start again. The shackles were thrown off and the last remnants of the 1966 team were cast aside when Martin Peters was replaced in the front three with a new crop of footballing talent that included Stan Bowles and Kevin Keegan. Mercer had made his name as an industrious left back that had an eye for a tackle and could read the game well. He played over 430 league games in his time at Everton first, then Arsenal. His managerial career was a mixed bag, seeing relegation on one hand and League and Cup success

on the other; he also guided Manchester City to European Cup Winners' Cup glory in 1970, but it was while he was with Coventry City that the FA came knocking.

Taking the reins for the first time in Cardiff for the Home International with Wales – a 2-0 win in which Bowles grabbed the first and only goal of his too short stay in the England set-up, something that was largely his own fault after walking away from the squad after being substituted against Northern Ireland – Mercer also introduced Keith Weller to the scene, as well as Frank Worthington. Weller scored the only goal in the 1-0 win over the Irish in his second game, whereas Worthington had to wait until his third appearance to get on the scoresheet in a 2-2 draw with Argentina at Wembley.

In total, Mercer was in charge for seven games, losing just once, a 2-0 reverse at the hands of Scotland. He even gained some very creditable results on a tour of the Eastern bloc countries, a win in Bulgaria, and draws in both East Germany and Yugoslavia. During this trip, he was experimenting with new players and giving the likes of Dave Watson, Martin Dobson and Trevor Brooking a full 90 minutes. He even gave Ray Clemence the goalkeeping duties and unwittingly this led to a friendly rivalry for the number one shirt with Peter Shilton for close on a decade.

Mercer's 36-day stint at the helm had the desired effect on the team and those following it. New faces and fresh innovative ideas were now front and centre. This led to a bit of a problem for the FA. They were busy pursuing the man who they thought would return the national team back amongst the world's elite, all the while having someone who could do just that currently in their employment. Mercer was never formally offered the job full time and so we'll never know if he could have gone on to bigger and greater things. There was a temptation amongst those high up in Lancaster Gate to entertain the idea, but so set was their masterplan that the notion didn't pass.

To manage at the highest level, whether it be club football or international level, there are many things you need to have. Two of the biggest that the new man possessed were character and leadership, and these were traits that the FA hoped would bring the national team back into the hearts and minds of world football. Don Revie was a centre forward during his playing days that saw him score just shy of 100 league goals, and four more for his country in just six appearances. After 18 years he hung up his boots and took to management, and even though his days on the field were recognised with those half a dozen caps, it was his time as boss of Leeds United that made his name. Revered for the way he took Leeds from a struggling Second Division team that had never won a major trophy to a side that would challenge for honours year in, year out during his time at Elland Road.

After securing promotion in just his third year, he had Leeds on the brink of the First Division title for three successive years before finally bringing home the championship in 1968/69. Narrowly missing out for the next three years, the fans were also in delirium when he added the FA Cup in 1972, this after bagging the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1968 and 1971. A finalist of the Cup Winners' Cup in 1973, losing 1-0 to AC Milan, and a shock defeat to Sunderland in the same year's FA Cup final by the same score, the following season he won the league title for the second time to add to his growing list and now sizeable ego. Revie was as good as it could get, and at the time only Brian Clough was anywhere near his equal.

'Two things I'd like to say. One is that I'm delighted to have been made England team manager, and also, it's a sad day to leave a club you've been with for 13 years,' Revie said when his appointment became official. His first game in charge would be the opening game in the qualification for the 1976 European Championships to be held in Yugoslavia, against a very strong Czechoslovakia in late October. Also in the group



from which only the winners would progress were Cyprus and Portugal.

It was very much the dawn of a new era. Revie imposed his own style with a kit change as well. Gone were the clean white jerseys, replaced with a more modern-looking kit. The white was still prominent but the sleeves had red and blue stripes down them. The FA were placing a lot of faith in Revie, and in a special note in the evening's match programme he was honest and forthright about the job in hand.

'It is not going to be an easy road over the next few years; there is a lot of hard work and planning to do in an endeavour to qualify for South America in the 1978 World Cup. Tonight is the first step of that long, hard road to achieve that aim. I would like to thank you once again, for coming to Wembley to support us and only hope that the lads put up a performance and get the right result. We will do our best to achieve this tonight, but we cannot guarantee anything in football, as you will realise.'

Gerry Francis was given his debut in midfield, Channon and Keegan spearheaded the attack, but it was the tireless advancing play of Colin Bell that grabbed the headlines the next day as England started this new adventure with a 3-0 win. The introduction of another debutant proved to be the spark in a game which at one point Revie thought of the game being 'another Poland' as the goals came late, all in the last 20 minutes. Three weeks later Portugal were the visitors. Revie made four changes to the line-up, and Cooper and Clarke of Leeds were drafted in. The Portuguese were no longer the big threat they were a decade before but they were resilient and the game ended goalless.

To commemorate the 100th full international game played by England at senior level, a special fixture was arranged against West Germany at Wembley. The current World Champions and old nemesis would give Revie a chance to impose his style against an elite team, one he knew would have to be beaten

now and further down the line if his ultimate aim of making England great again would come to fruition. A bright display was highlighted by goals from Bell and Macdonald, back in the team for the first time in almost a year, a return which would pay dividends in the next qualifying game against Cyprus when 'Supermac' bagged all five goals in a romp.

Very much in the driving seat at the top of the group with seven points, the Czechs played catch-up with two convincing wins in ten days. England then went to Cyprus looking to inflict a similar score to that of a month before. It was heavy going on a pitch that was more Sunday football than it was international standard, which led one England player to state, 'If you'd walked across the pitch afterwards, you'd know how difficult it was.' A sixth-minute goal by Keegan was enough to seal the win and two more points. Revie had now been in charge for five games, winning four, and outscoring their opponents 11-0. It really couldn't have been a better start to the new regime. A welcome break from the qualifying process was the Home Nations Championship, a goalless draw in Belfast, a game that saw Keegan almost come to blows with Revie over a misunderstanding. The manager called his squad together before the game and, with the Troubles making unprecedented headlines through the IRA, he asked if anyone wanted to opt out of the trip. None did, but when he took Keegan to one side and asked if he wanted some time off, the player was enraged: 'Are you telling me I'm dropped?' Apparently though it was Revie being cautious as the FA had received a death threat with Keegan the marked man. In defiance Keegan travelled and was a constant blur on the field. 'I must confess that I was worried. I never took a throw-in or a corner. I kept to the middle of the pitch as much as I could. Working on the theory that a moving target would be harder to hit, I never stopped running.'

This was followed by a 2-2 result against the Welsh at Wembley, before a rousing 5-1 win over Scotland with Gerry

Francis scoring two and a huge influence in England's forward play throughout. Revie was content with his start but it was far from the finished product. Being unbeaten was, of course, a bonus but his aim as stated from the start was the 1978 World Cup. He would therefore use the next few months, which ended with a summer tour of the USA, bringing in new players and trying new formations and systems so he could get the right balance before that qualification process started.

England played a friendly in Switzerland in the September, a 2-1 win with Channon getting the winning goal, giving the camp further reason to be optimistic about the next two fixtures on the road in Bratislava against the Czechs, and in Lisbon versus the Portuguese. These two games would decide whether Revie would be taking his men into the latter stages of the Euro '76 tournament. Maybe it was a sign of things to come when the scheduled game against Czechoslovakia was abandoned after just eight minutes due to a thick fog that had visibility down to mere feet. It was then, of course, laughable that in those opening few moments England had the ball in the net, only for the linesman who was on the far side of the pitch to flag for offside. The match was to be played the next day with an afternoon kick-off.

A capacity crowd of just over 50,000 saw England take the lead at the second time of asking. Halfway through the first half, a jinking run down the left from Keegan saw him cut inside and place a sublime cross into the path of Channon who took a heavy touch just inside the area, but gathered himself enough to place a superb lob into the top left of the goal over an outstretched arm of Ivo Viktor. On the stroke of half-time, the Czechs hit back through a corner. The ball was swung in with pace to the near post and Zdenek Nehoda placed his fierce header high into the net giving Clemence no chance. The game completely swung against England just two minutes after the restart. A swift move through the middle and a quick cross

from the right was met with a diving header by Dusan Galis. 'Everything was going to plan in the first half until the Czechs scored. We went to sleep for a corner and subsequently we were not in the right position at the right time and it cost us a goal. We now have to depend on Portugal to get us into the quarter-finals,' said Revie after the game.

The loss was England's first under the new management and spelt the first time they were placed under pressure. It meant that qualification was out of their hands and, as Revie pointed out, Portugal needed to help by getting at least a draw when the Czechs visited in two weeks' time, then England would have to go to Lisbon and win to stand a chance of progressing. Portugal held up their part by holding the Czech team to a 1-1 draw. Now with England tied at the top of the group, it was vital that England win a week later.

Sometimes football throws up some strange turns of events and weird twists, and so going into this game Revie found himself with a head-scratcher as on the eve of the game he was faced with a problem that only 15 of his travelling 20 players were fit enough to play. Paul Madeley, Stuart Pearson and Dennis Tueart were all extreme doubts, and with key components Colin Todd and Gerry Francis facing late fitness tests, it was its own test for Revie to find the right balance to a team that needed to get the Czech loss out of its system and be in the right frame of mind to take on a stubborn Portugal that could still qualify, though that was a very long shot. 'I shall probably not know the team until shortly before the kick-off tomorrow, which means that we will be getting to grips with things like corners, throw-ins, free kicks, defensive wall line-ups. All the dead ball situations in fact.' Revie was highlighting the need to avoid the mess that led to the equalising goal for Czechoslovakia last time out.

For those doing the mathematics it was reasonably straightforward. A single goal margin win for England meant

that the Czechs would have to win in Cyprus by three clear goals. Not easy on their cabbage patch. In the end, Francis and Todd both started, as did Madeley, and after a bristling opening in which Keegan had a goal ruled out for offside it was the hosts who took the lead, and how. Rodrigues placed the ball down and after an enormous run-up to the ball, struck a free kick sublimely with power and swerve to the top right corner of Clemence's goal. England were rocking and Toni and Nene could easily have put the game beyond them had they shown more composure with just a stranded Clemence to beat.

With half-time beckoning, Channon was bundled over just outside the box and a perfect chance was gifted to Revie's men to level the score. With a handful of players wanting to take responsibility and take the kick, it was in fact Channon who hit the ball cleanly and with a wicked deflection the ball flew past a wrong-footed Damas. Both teams squandered chances to win the game in the second half, with Nene and Alves looking more threatening going forward than the entire England team put together. Nene was guilty of a couple of glaring misses, or indeed saves from the now established choice in Revie's goal, Ray Clemence.

Three days later the Czechs beat Cyprus 3-0, all the goals coming in the first 35 minutes of the match, and once more England had failed to reach the latter stages of a major tournament. If going out wasn't painful enough, Revie had another run-in with Football League secretary Alan Hardaker. Revie had previously requested that league fixtures get suspended the weekend before an international fixture. After the draw in Lisbon, Hardaker remarked, 'It would not have made a scrap of difference [to England's performance had last Saturday's fixtures been postponed]. I am a cynical man and it sounded to me that we smacked of excuses before we even left for Portugal. We must face up to the fact that we were not good enough. At the moment it's all money, money, money.'

Harsh words maybe, but the fact that another indifferent set of results in a qualifying stage of a tournament meant that these were words being mumbled by the public as well. Revie's response was to type: 'It's hard to believe that a person in such a responsible position in football should say such things. But I do not wish to be involved in a slanging match over this, especially if it may harm England's chances in the future. Money or Pride? The players have never discussed money or bonuses or asked for them. They have not received any money because they are paid on results.' If this was the case the current squad would not be making any financial gain anytime soon.

In the days between the game in Portugal, and Czechoslovakia booking their place in the next round of the European Championships, the draw for qualification to the 1978 World Cup took place in Guatemala City. There were 31 European nations drawn into nine groups, and England were pulled out alongside Finland, Luxembourg and Italy. This was the reason why Revie had taken the job, to take his brand of football to a World Cup and challenge his mind, and his players, against the best there was to offer. The group was favourable, and Finland and Luxembourg were, with all due respect, to be the whipping boys, whereas the Italians would be the big hurdle to overcome. 'We have been very, very fortunate, especially as we were not seeded. Matches against these smaller countries are not easy and these games have to be won. As for the Italians, they will be difficult to beat. They are a good side, with a lot of skilful players. It is up to us entirely if we are to qualify, but I am optimistic.'

Into the summer of 1976 and, after a decent Home Nations, a loss to the Auld Enemy Scotland being the only blemish, Revie took his squad to the USA for their Bicentennial Cup, an event arranged to showcase the North American Soccer League. The mini-tour included a game against the NASL all-star team, or simply put, Team America. Their squad included George

Best, Bobby Moore, Rodney Marsh and Pele. First though was Brazil in Los Angeles, and a 1-0 last-minute defeat was perhaps harsh on a near-full strength England team. Then in New York against Italy. A 3-2 win was welcome but the team was very inexperienced and handed debuts to Jimmy Rimmer in goal and Ray Wilkins in midfield. Rimmer was replaced at half-time in a move which may or may not have been prearranged, but the two-goal deficit didn't help his cause and Joe Corrigan was subsequently given his first cap. Within minutes of the restart England were ahead through a Channon brace and Phil Thompson. The winner, the third goal in just eight minutes of play, was set up by the sublime skill of Trevor Brooking making light work of the heavy pitch, dropping a perfect cross from the right into the path of the ever-willing Channon.

Of course, this result, albeit a fine comeback, would be no real indication as to what lay ahead for Revie's men in the qualifying games that were to come. Just over two weeks later, England were in Helsinki for their opening group game against Finland. Now bearing in mind that Revie himself had said not to underestimate the smaller teams, he did go on record suggesting he would 'settle for four goals'. He must have been crystal ball gazing as that's exactly what his team conjured up. Leading 2-1 at the break, it wasn't until a quick double from Channon and Keegan put the game beyond the Finns' reach. The performance was steady and assured and a good platform to build upon as the season came to a close.

By the time Finland came to Wembley in October, they had already dispatched Luxembourg 7-1 and so came with some confidence, but it was still a game that England were expected to win handsomely. Revie didn't quite see it that way and erred on the side of caution. 'We won't score six, seven or eight goals just by walking on the pitch. Our first aim is to win and of course it is important to score as many goals as possible.' Was this another wise prediction from the England manager?

All seemed well after just five minutes as Tueart was on hand to lash the ball in after a crude handball on the line denied Joe Royle a headed goal. It was to be the only goal of the half. Try as England did to add to the fine start, the Finns held firm and then completely shook the home crowd when they levelled the score. A low drive from Nieminen squirmed through the body of Clemence. Less than five minutes later the lead was restored: fine work from Channon as he was forced wide to the left, he sent in a low hard cross that just needed a touch which duly came from Royle's head in the centre of the goal. Instead of the start of a flow of goals, it was to be the end of the night's scoring. A full house at Wembley jeered the team off, patience having run very thin for a team that before the game Revie had noted as his 'most attacking', but afterwards had to concede that they were found lacking in front of goal.

'I want to apologise to them [the fans] on behalf of myself and the team. We lost our rhythm, our passing, our thinking, our positional sense, our balance. In fact, everything,' said a low Revie after the game. This was his Poland '73. The fact they won the game didn't gloss over the fact that this was a near mirror to Ramsey's fateful day in losing out to Poland almost four years to the day. In a group that would likely come down to goal difference, this was a monumental chance missed to put pressure on an Italian team that three days later went to Luxembourg and won 4-1. In just five weeks' time England would travel to Rome where a loss would make it very hard to start planning trips to South America in the summer of 1978. For some, after this game, that thought was already dissipating.

Enzo Bearzot was a year into his tenure in charge of the Italian national side, and was turning their fortunes around in a way that Revie was hoping to do with England. 'This means they are playing a containing game, but that is against their nature,' was his comment after Brian Greenhoff was a somewhat surprise inclusion in the England team. Bearzot was



also made to adjust his line-up bringing in Claudio Gentile, for someone he likened to Jimmy Greaves. Stan Bowles had not played for England in two and a half years, but now he was the man spearheading an attack that had to get something from this game to restore faith with the nation. Gentile, part of a Juventus team that had seen success over both Manchester clubs in the UEFA Cup earlier in the season, was brought into the team with the sole purpose of stopping Bowles' movement, something that was a cause for concern for the chain-smoking Italian boss.

The Italians were not making this game as critical as the English media were, because it was still early in the qualifying group and the two would meet again in a year's time. Unless one or the other would go on to win this game by a margin that would usually be reserved for the likes of Luxembourg, the group would still be in the balance. No doubting though a marker would be laid down. An underlying thought to the game was that a defeat would start many to stir the pot on Revie's future. His team selection wasn't an out and out gamble but the excuses of injuries and players' loss of form were starting to wear thin.

For a long time, England teams were known for being fast, aggressive to the ball, and in many ways similar to a club team. This had been their downfall for the past six or seven years. Of course, the players had skill, some more than others, but rarely showed a real flair and inventiveness consistently. In Rome's cauldron-like Olympic Stadium, England were outthought and overrun at times in the central areas. Even though as Bearzot had suggested they managed to play a decent containing game for the opening quarter of the game, once the Italian midfield got a grip of the game they would not let go. Franco Causio was a constant thorn, Giancarlo Antognoni hustled his way through the game, and Romeo Benetti and Francesco Graziani moved with purpose. England couldn't cope. The first goal in

the 2-0 defeat was somewhat fortunate – the warning signs had long been flashing though – and it came ten minutes before the interval. Winning a free kick just outside the box, Causio rolled the ball to his left where it was met with a thumping drive by Antognoni. An onrushing Keegan could only deflect the ball, and Clemence couldn't adjust in time to keep the ball out. Despite all their probing, Italy had to wait until the 77th minute to lock up the win. A sweeping move, involving Benetti and Causio, ended with a firmly placed header by Roberto Bettega.

'Naturally, I am disappointed. I thought we played as well as could be expected. It's now out of our hands. We can only hope that Finland or Luxembourg upset the Italians. The goals came at critical times, especially the first,' a downbeat Revie remarked after the loss. England were halfway through their games and only had four points to show for their efforts. Even though they had two games to come against Luxembourg and a chance to bolster the goal difference, the Italians had definitely gained the upper hand. If there were any more lacklustre performances the calls for Revie to be removed from his post would be loud and clear.

Things didn't get better for England and Revie when in February 1977 Holland visited Wembley for a friendly match. The Dutch were full of world class players that so nearly won the last World Cup with their brand of Total Football. Krol, Peters, Rep and Cruyff were out to pour further misery on England. On a rain-filled London night, the Dutch were simply untouchable. At times, even the maestro Cruyff would just stand and watch as his teammates danced their way around England. It was Jan Peters who bagged both goals to down England, in simple and balletic moves. 'There is no point in kidding ourselves. We just couldn't cope. It was a lesson in control and passing and not giving the ball away.' The post-match comments were starting to sound repetitive. The team performances were also beginning to look very stagnant. Bereft

of ideas, and asking how they could live with more illustrious opponents; with heads bowed, the England team left the field to loud jeering.

A month later the qualifying process resumed. Where excuses about injuries had presented Revie with some justification, this time it was a valid excuse for not having the spine of his team in action. That being said, the players from Luxembourg, the majority being amateurs, were expected to be rolled over with considerable ease. Kevin Keegan would lead the team out and he stated that the importance of scoring many goals to beef up the goal difference was being 'played down', suggesting that their games towards the end of the campaign may not even matter: 'If Italy need nine [in the last group game against Luxembourg] they could still do it.' After a tepid start, England shifted tactics and brought Cherry into a more advanced position, allowing Keegan more freedom to move in amongst the nine-man human wall of defence that Luxembourg had set up. Their reward for this switch was for Keegan to nod the ball home after ten minutes. The expected floodgates did not open and high balls into the area were either dealt with easily, or more often executed poorly. This had an adverse effect on another near full house. The faithful fans who were sticking with their team through this troubled time were calling for the introduction of Paul Mariner, sitting on the bench waiting for his number to be called. He did come on and even though he didn't get on the scoresheet, he was enough of a nuisance in the box to give his teammates opportunities. Trevor Francis, Ray Kennedy, and two from Channon in a 23-minute spell put some gloss on a night that was otherwise looking like another to forget.

England suffered a poor set of results in the Home Nations, their only win courtesy of a late Tueart goal against Northern Ireland. The home defeat to Scotland was greeted with a huge pitch invasion dubbed 'the worst I have ever seen' by FA

secretary Ted Croker. Revie was surprisingly upbeat about the performance, saying it was better than the one offered against Wales a few days earlier. In the summer, Italy won away in Finland to regain the lead in the group but only by a one goal advantage, both teams on six points. Revie had flown out to be present in Helsinki, his homework on the Italians keeping him away from the first match of their tour of South America in what was hoped would be a forerunner to the real thing the following year in the World Cup. A goalless draw in Rio against Brazil was followed by a 1-1 stalemate against Argentina that was of note for Trevor Cherry's sending off for a horrible tackle on Daniel Bertoni who also saw red after punching Cherry in the face in retaliation. The final match on the tour was another goalless encounter, this time with Uruguay.

Unbeknownst to everyone, this was to be Don Revie's last game in charge of England.