

CHRISTOPHER BEESLEY

SPIRIT OF THE BLUES



Everton's Most Memorable Matches
& Goodison Park's Greatest Games

FOREWORD BY KEVIN RATCLIFFE

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Prologue

THE CLUB that would become Everton FC was founded in 1878 as St Domingo's FC so members of the congregation at St Domingo Methodist New Connexion Chapel in Breckfield Road North (in Everton) could play sport all year round in addition to their cricket in the summer.

Defeating Everton Church Club 1-0 in their inaugural fixture, the club changed their name to Everton the following year as men outside the congregation wished to participate in the team, and they overcame St Peter's 6-0 in the first game after the change.

Despite their name, the club have never technically played home matches in Everton as they originally turned out on an open pitch in Anfield in the south-east corner of Stanley Park, which had opened in 1870, before briefly moving to a site with turnstiles on Priory Road where they beat Hartford St John's 3-1 in their first match, on 3 November 1883.

Landowner William Cruit quickly lost his patience with the noise and unruly behaviour of the team's increasingly large crowds though, and in the following March he gave them notice to quit.

In September 1884, the *Liverpool Courier* reported that Everton were moving to a patch of land owned by Joseph Orrell on Anfield Road and on 18 May the next year, their president, a certain John Houlding, bought it outright to become landlord of his own club.

Playing at Anfield, Everton started to attract some of the biggest attendances in the country and it was this kind of pulling

power that helped them get the nod over their local rivals Bootle FC – who arguably had a better on-field record at the time – when it came to being admitted to the pioneering Football League in 1888.

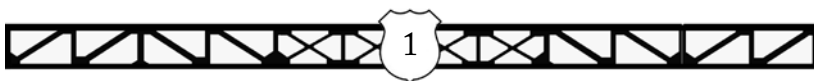
Everton attracted the only five-figure crowd of the Football League's opening day on 8 September as they defeated Accrington 2-1, and they would boast the highest average gates throughout the first decade of the competition, meaning Evertonians can lay claim to being the English game's first major fanbase.

While still at Anfield, they became the first club to lift the league championship trophy at the end of the 1890/91 campaign – Preston North End, the title winners for the first two seasons, had to make do with a flag – but after their maiden success, the Everton committee and Houlding became embroiled in a deep and bitter conflict over their rent.

The result was that Houlding was left with his ground empty and decided to fill the void with a new team he had created from scratch.

It might not sit well with many modern-day Kopites but whereas Everton, the senior club in the city, were formed because a group of young Scousers wanted to play football, Liverpool FC only exists because a Tory businessman wanted to make more money.

'King John', as Houlding was known, wanted to call his new side Everton but the Football League would not recognise such claims so he picked the name Liverpool FC instead and his hired guns, dubbed the 'Team of Macs' because he raided Scotland to manufacture a ready-made squad, had to start in the Lancashire League while Everton crossed Stanley Park to a new site called Mere Green field in Walton where they constructed Goodison Park, England's first purpose-built football ground.



Genesis

BOTH CLUBS have their own differing versions of events that resulted in Everton's move and the creation of Liverpool FC, but with John Houlding's proposal again defeated, James Corbett's *Everton: The School of Science* records that during a special general meeting at the former Liverpool College building on Shaw Street on 25 January 1892, Everton board member George Mahon suggested that the existing team relocate to another site and when a heckler shouted, 'You can't find one,' he replied, 'I've got one in my pocket.'

Mere Green field, next to Goodison Road – less than a mile from the Anfield Road ground at their nearest points – was owned by Christopher Leyland with Everton renting until they were in a position to buy outright.

Mr Barton was contracted to excavate the site (levelling the field, installing a drainage system and laying the turf) at a cost of £552.

Walton-based builders Kelly Brothers erected two uncovered stands, both holding 4,000 spectators, plus a covered stand for an additional 3,000 at a cost of £1,640, while exterior hoardings were added for £150 and a dozen turnstiles at £7 each with Everton committee man and future chairman Dr James Baxter donating a £1,000 interest-free loan to help towards the funding.

The president of the Football Association, Lord Kinnaird, came up from London for Goodison Park's official opening on

24 August 1892, attending an inaugural lunch at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool city centre before a procession of open carriages made their way up to the ground through streets of flag-waving crowds.

The *Liverpool Mercury* reported that during his speech at the dinner table, Kinnaird said it was his desire that Everton should follow in his footsteps, [in] his endeavours to hold for association football a position of respect for sportsmen as a national game.

He believed association football to be as good a game as any other, and his object, and the object of the Everton club, was to maintain the game as a national sport, and not to allow it to play second fiddle to cricket.

In common with the Everton club, it was his endeavour to save the game from the taint of rowdyism and betting, and he looked to the club to support him and his colleagues on the council of the association in the decisions they might come to when such points were raised.

Any committee putting its foot down at any piece of rowdyism would, he was sure, receive the support of players and spectators.

It was because Everton had always upheld these principles that gave him great pleasure to propose such a toast.

* * *

1 September 1892: Everton 4 Bolton Wanderers 2 (First ever game at Goodison Park)

Goodison Park's first ever football match – played a week after the official opening by Lord Kinnaird, which came complete with an athletics display and fireworks – was a high-profile curtain raiser to Everton's upcoming First Division campaign.

The *Liverpool Mercury* reported, 'The weather was threatening, but in spite of that unfavourable condition there was a capital attendance, numbering 10,000.'

In contrast, across Stanley Park, at the Anfield ground that Everton had vacated in acrimonious fashion, Liverpool were watched

by what the same publication described as a ‘moderate attendance’ (estimated at around 1,000) as they thrashed Rotherham Town 7-1 in their first ever game.

While Everton’s neighbours would soon catch them up in terms of both stature and support, the longer-established outfit were still very much in the ascendancy for the short term at least.

The choice of Bolton as friendly opponents to christen Everton’s new home ahead of competitive action seemed an obvious one.

The Trotters had finished the previous season in third position in the Football League – two places above Everton – and the roles would ultimately be reversed in 1892/93.

Also, just 48 hours before the respective sides’ opening First Division fixtures (the game was played on 1 September, not 2 September as widely reported in later chronicles), Bolton were geographically Everton’s closest top-flight rivals with their Pike’s Lane ground situated just 27 miles up the East Lancs Road.

The *Mercury* recorded that ‘a most cordial reception’ was accorded to each 11 with Everton chairman George Mahon eliciting cheers with the ceremonial kick-off, an act Houlding would replicate that same night at Anfield.

The report added, ‘The play at once became of an earnest character, the ball being impelled quickly from end to end. Excitement was thus aroused at the outset.’

Bolton’s Kilburn-born centre-forward Jim Cassidy – who in 1890 had netted five times in a 13-0 FA Cup mauling of Sheffield United in which Davie Weir, namesake of a future Everton defender, also bagged four – had the honour of scoring Goodison Park’s first-ever goal early in the contest.

Joe Dickenson doubled the visitors’ advantage as neither side held back and the *Mercury* observed, ‘The play was most interesting, and quite as keen as it would have been in a league match.’

Fred Geary – who later returned to the club as groundsman despite a subsequent playing spell at Liverpool – became the

inaugural Everton goalscorer at Goodison as his low shot beat Bolton keeper John Willie Sutcliffe (the last man to represent England at both football and rugby union).

Alex Latta then netted to draw Everton level and it's at this point the report states that they 'soon caused the Wanderers to beat a retreat and literally stormed the goal' with the siege culminating in Edgar Chadwick scoring to give the hosts a 3-2 lead at the interval.

Everton started the second half in a similar fashion and bagged what proved to be the final goal of the night as Dickie Boyle netted from the rebound from an Alf Milward shot.

In an era long before floodlights, the absence of any further scoring after the earlier frenzy might be attributed to the setting sun with the report concluding, 'The light grew faint, though play continued to be followed with zest.'

When Everton returned to action two days later for their first competitive fixture at Goodison Park, an even bigger crowd of some 14,000 turned up to watch them play Nottingham Forest, who were making their own debut in the competition.

The East Midlanders, who joined neighbours Notts County in the top flight and would finish above their relegated local rivals in 1892/93, had won what proved to be the final edition of the Football Alliance (an alternative to the Football League that Bootle had entered when Everton had controversially been chosen ahead of them) the previous season.

Forest, who the *Mercury* noted were 'in the charmed circle for the first time', proved to be worthy adversaries and held Everton to a 2-2 draw in what was described as 'a capital game'.