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HISTORY OF FOOTBALL



IN 90 MINUTES (PLUS EXTRA TIME)

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BEN JONES AND GARETH THOMAS
THE FOOTBALL HISTORY BOYS

THE
HISTORY OF
FOOTBALL
IN **90** **MINUTES**
(PLUS EXTRA TIME)

BEN JONES AND GARETH THOMAS
THE FOOTBALL HISTORY BOYS



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Nándor Hidegkuti opens the scoring at Wembley (1953)

‘KEEP IT tight early on, give nothing silly away!’

Often, that is the instruction given by managers at the start of football matches across the world. However, on 23 November 1953, Hungary had no such plans to keep it tight as within the first minute they took the lead at Wembley Stadium versus their hosts, England. The game that would take place is commonly labelled the ‘Match of the Century’ – a fixture which is etched into football history.

Hungary came to Wembley as reigning Olympic gold medallists and on an unbeaten run of 24 matches. England, though, had never lost on home soil to a side from outside the British Isles. This would be a fascinating clash, but as over 105,000 fans packed into the national stadium there was no genuine belief they were about to witness a shock.

Hungary’s XI contained the likes of Ferenc Puskás, Sándor Kocsis and Zoltán Czibor and they were led by their innovative coach Gusztáv Sebes. England would line up in their usual WM formation, while Hungary’s inventive 2-3-3-2 formation (played like a 4-2-4), would allow for József Bozsik, ‘one of the finest playmakers in European soccer history’,¹⁰ to pull the strings creatively alongside deep-lying centre-forward Nándor

10 Dave Thompson, *Football FAQ* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2015) p 151

Hidegkuti. This allowed goal machines Puskás and Kocsis the opportunity to relentlessly attack the opposing defence, as England were about to find out.

England's side, featuring some all-time greats like Stanley Matthews, Stan Mortensen and Alf Ramsey, were overwhelmed in the first minute. Hidegkuti found space in the inside-right channel and blasted a shot past goalkeeper Gil Merrick. Despite Jackie Sewell levelling for England in the 13th minute, just seven minutes later Hidegkuti had a second. Puskás got in on the act with a brace of his own, the first a glorious drag-back. Puskás, on the right side of the six-yard box, saw England captain Billy Wright ready to come flying in to make a tackle. Dragging the ball back with his heel, Wright was sent sliding away as the Galloping Major smashed the ball home. Puskás described the 'instinctive' move as 'my favourite goal of all time'¹¹ – and he had a lot to choose from.

Despite Mortensen pulling England back to 4-2 behind at the interval, Hungary continued the rout in the second half. Bozsik added a fifth before Hidegkuti completed his hat-trick in the 53rd minute. Ramsey's penalty notched a third for England but when the final whistle blew, the score read England 3 Hungary 6. The thumping was resounding, and the *Daily Mirror* waxed lyrical about the Hungarians in its match report the next day, crediting them as 'masters of the ball, of position, of movement'.¹²

England wanted revenge so in May 1954 they would travel to Hungary to right the wrongs of Wembley. Puskás (who scored 84 international goals in 85 appearances), Kocsis (75 in 68) and Hidegkuti (39 in 69) once more tore England apart. The Hungarians decimated England again, this time 7-1, and centre-half Syd Owen described the experience as 'like playing people from outer space'.¹³

11 *The Guardian*, 19 November 2006

12 *Daily Mirror*, 26 November 1953

13 Jonathan Wilson, *Inverting the Pyramid: The History of Football Tactics* (London: Orion, 2010) p.90

England, the self-proclaimed creators of the beautiful game, had been destroyed at home and away by the Mighty, Magical Magyars. Along with their 1950 World Cup humiliation (Minute 38), the 1950s provided a wake-up call to the British nations. They were, in fact, not as good as they thought they were.