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Foreword by Brian Little



UNDER THE FLOODLIGHTS!

The Story of the English
Football League Cup
1960–2024



Contents

Foreword by Brian Little	6
Inception	8
1. The 1960s	17
2. The 1970s	63
3. The 1980s	116
4. The 1990s	159
5. The 2000s	212
6. The 2010s	263
7. The 2020s	318
Epilogue	339
The League Cup Finals in Stats and Sponsorship	345
Acknowledgements	350
Bibliography	352

The 1960s

Season 1960/61

The Final

First leg: 22 August 1961

Rotherham United 2 (Webster, Kirkman) Aston Villa 0

Millmoor, Rotherham

Attendance: 12,226

Referee: K.A. Collinge

Second leg: 5 September 1961

Aston Villa 3 (O'Neill, Burrows, McParland) Rotherham
United 0 (after extra time)

Villa Park, Birmingham

Attendance: 31,201

Referee: C.W. Kingston

Aston Villa won 3-2 on aggregate

The format for the inaugural Football League Cup from the first round to the quarter-finals was a knockout tournament with replays if there was a stalemate and further ones until there was an actual winner. The semi-finals and the final were two-legged affairs with clubs playing each other home and away. The very first League Cup ties took place on Monday,

26 September 1960 when Second Division Bristol Rovers beat First Division Fulham 2-1 in front of over 20,000 supporters and West Ham United giving back parity to the First Division teams when they defeated second-tier Charlton Athletic 3-1. The very first scorer in the competition was Fulham's centre-forward Maurice Cook, who put his team in the lead after just nine minutes.

If the League Cup had begun slowly with just a couple of games in September, then the following month saw the complete opposite with ties coming thick and fast. Not all teams entered the first round but participated from the second round onwards, and the fixture dictators had deemed it necessary to play both the first and second rounds in the same month, and this did not take into consideration any replays.

The biggest shock of the first round occurred at Layer Road, home of Third Division Colchester United, who embarrassed First Division Newcastle United, beating the Magpies convincingly 4-1.

The shocks continued in the second round with Bradford City from the Third Division beating the might of Manchester United 2-1 and Fourth Division Darlington knocking out West Ham 4-1. Aston Villa and Rotherham both entered in the second round.

First Division Villa eased into the third round with a 4-1 victory over Huddersfield Town, a level below the Midlands giants, and Second Division Rotherham beating Leicester City, one division above them, 2-1 away from home.

Rotherham's reward for taking out the Foxes was a third-round home draw against Bristol Rovers.

Villa's route into the fourth round was not as straightforward. Drawn away to First Division rivals Preston North End, the game ended in a thrilling 3-3 draw which could have gone either way. The replay back at Villa Park saw the home team progress 3-1.

As in the second round, Rotherham were drawn away to a First Division club, swapping the Foxes of Leicester with the Trotters from Bolton Wanderers and once again coming away with a victory, this time 2-0. For Aston Villa, it was a similar situation to the third round, once more sharing a six-goal thriller, but this time at home to Plymouth Argyle. The replay was very much 'after the Lord Mayor's Show' with both teams not able to put the ball into the net. The second replay saw Plymouth once again hosting Villa, and this time it was a goal-fest with no fewer than eight scored; five to Villa and three to the home side.

Both teams were drawn at home in the quarter-finals, and both had comfortable victories by the same scoreline of 3-0, Villa against Wrexham and Rotherham over Portsmouth.

The semi-final draw was made in February 1961 after the conclusion of the quarter-finals. Unlike the rounds up to that point, the semi-finals were played over two legs, with each team playing one leg at home. The matches were played in March, April and May 1961. Aston Villa were drawn away to Burnley in the first leg and Rotherham were drawn at home to Third Division

Shrewsbury Town in the other. The first ever League Cup semi-finals had two teams from the top tier and one each from the second and third.

Rotherham had reached the semi-final without having to endure any replays. It had taken Villa three replays to make the stage, and they made it four to reach the final. The first leg at Turf Moor had finished 1-1, and the return leg at Villa Park ended up 2-2. Penalty shoot-outs were a firm thing in the future so it was to be another replay, which once again saw Villa through, winning 2-1 at Old Trafford.

Rotherham had beaten Shrewsbury 3-2 at Millmoor before a 1-1 draw at Gay Meadow, ensuring that the first ever League Cup Final was contested between the Second Division Millers and Aston Villa of the First Division.

However, it did not take place in the 1960/61 season, but at the start of the following one.

The first leg of the final was played on 22 August 1961 at Millmoor, with just over 12,000 in attendance. After a cagey opening half, the game sprung into life in the 51st minute when Barry Webster opened the scoring for the home team, and then the lead was doubled just four minutes later via Alan Kirkman. Rotherham managed to keep Villa at bay for the remaining 35 minutes and took a 2-0 lead into the second leg.

The return leg took place at Villa Park on 5 September with just shy of 31,500 fans in the stadium, and just like at Millmoor, the first half was goalless, putting enormous pressure on the home team who

needed to score at least three goals to win the match with potentially just 45 minutes to play.

The Villa terraces were nervous as were the players on the pitch, but on 68 minutes they were calmed somewhat when Alan O'Neill pulled a goal back. A minute later, Harry Burrows converted to level the tie. Villa Park was rocking. There were no more goals in regulation time and so it was to extra time, something that was alien to Rotherham during the campaign in the cup, but certainly not to Villa. Would there be another replay for them? This was answered in the 112th minute when Villa legend Peter McParland put the ball into the net and for the first time in both games in the final, Villa were ahead. It was to be the final goal of the tournament and made Aston Villa the winners of the inaugural Football League Cup. McParland had been the hero for Villa in 1957 when his two goals against Manchester United in the FA Cup Final had been enough to give his side the victory. Now just four years later he was doing the same in the League Cup.

So, what had started on 26 September 1960 had ended almost 12 months later on 5 September 1961, spanning two seasons.

It was chaotic at times. The competition was derided by the press and failed to capture the imagination of football followers all over the country, except for a few matches where attendances were decent.

Stanley Rous's suggestion and Alan Hardaker's implementation had completed the League Cup's first cycle. It was by no means polished and was very much an

uncut gem. There was room for improvement, perhaps a lot more than Hardaker had envisaged.

The questions in his mind started with how was the cup formula going to improve and how would the teams who had not competed be enticed to do so? Could he retain the interest of those teams that had competed as well?

And, more importantly, would the cup survive?

Season 1961/62

The Final

First leg: 26 April 1962

Rochdale 0 Norwich City 3 (Lythgoe 2, Punton)

Spotland, Rochdale

Attendance: 11,123

Referee: A. Holland

Second leg: 1 May 1962

Norwich City 1 (Hill) Rochdale 0

Carrow Road, Norwich City

Attendance: 19,800

Referee: R.H. Mann

Norwich City won 4-0 on aggregate

Alan Hardaker was a man on a mission as the League Cup entered its second season. There were immediate changes made, byes allocated to certain teams with some clubs not joining in the second round, and still a small number of clubs abstained. But it was TV money, just like it is today, that helped maintain the vision for the cup. This contract was agreed for the 1961/62 season and

ensured participation from the clubs that had abstained to start to compete.

The immediate changes made were to ensure that the competition was completed in the season it started in, and also to eradicate the fixture pile-up that had seen first- and second-round matches being played at the same time.

Holders Aston Villa had got off to a winning start by beating Bradford City 4-3 away. Runners-up Rotherham United also won on their travels, 1-0 at Darlington. There were no real big cup upsets in the first round, except for perhaps Rochdale, who as a Fourth Division team had drawn away at Second Division Southampton, before finishing the job off with a 2-1 win at Spotland in the replay. Both Leicester City and Swansea Town were given byes into the second round.

Just like in its first season, the eventual winner of the cup didn't enter until the second round, Second Division Norwich City beating Lincoln City from the Third Division at Carrow Road. Rochdale had beaten fellow Fourth Division club Doncaster Rovers, with a comfortable 4-0 victory.

Both Aston Villa and Rotherham continued their quest for another final berth and a possible rematch. Villa won 3-1 at West Ham and Rotherham experienced their first replay after a goalless draw at Kenilworth Road, the home of Luton Town. They won the replay at Millmoor.

There was to be no more defending the cup in the third round for Aston Villa as they slumped to a 3-2 defeat at home to Ipswich Town. The chance for Rotherham

to redeem themselves and go one better continued after once again going through after a replay. Drawing 0-0 at Preston North End, they swept their opponents aside 3-0 at Millmoor. Norwich defeated Middlesbrough 3-2 and Rochdale disposed of Second Division Charlton Athletic by a single goal. The big upset in this round occurred at Bournemouth & Boscombe Athletic when the Third Division outfit beat Cardiff City 3-0. Cardiff were plying their trade in the top tier. Leeds United were afforded a bye into the fourth round.

Leeds were to become the latest victims for Rotherham, who experienced their third replay on the trot. Drawing 1-1 at Millmoor, Rotherham came away with a 2-1 victory in the replay at Elland Road.

There were only two other matches in the fourth round, with Blackburn Rovers thrashing Ipswich Town 4-1 and York City edging past Bournemouth 1-0.

The quarter-finals saw the end of Rotherham's remarkable run and ensured that two new teams would contest the final when they were defeated 1-0 at home to Blackburn. Rochdale beat York 2-1 at home and Norwich sailed through to the semi-final with a convincing 4-1 victory at Sunderland. Joining them were Blackpool, after winning 2-1 away at Sheffield United in a replay at Bramall Lane following a 0-0 draw at home.

The semi-final draw saw Rochdale play Blackburn and Norwich against Blackpool, and both were convincing home wins: 3-1 to Rochdale and 4-1 to Norwich. Blackburn and Blackpool exacted revenge by winning their second legs at home, but not with the

correct margin to go through to the final, so Norwich and Rochdale both went through 4-3 on aggregate.

The first leg of the final was held at Spotland, Rochdale's ground, on 26 April 1962, and the second leg was held at Carrow Road on 1 May.

Norwich dominated the first leg and came away with a 3-0 victory, almost making the second leg a formality, and they followed this up with a 1-0 win to make the aggregate score 4-0. Derrick Lythgoe scored a brace in the first 20 minutes in the first leg and Rochdale never really recovered. Bill Punton added the third on 84 minutes and it was Jimmy Hill who settled matters with the only goal at Carrow Road in the second leg.

It was perhaps a step too far for Rochdale who enthralled fans during all the campaign and were a credit to the bottom tier of English professional football. The *Rochdale Observer* was full of praise for the team's heroics but recognised that the damage was done in the first leg with its headline that read, 'Stale Rochdale Beaten by Norwich Snap'.