

A Captain must Command

By Jimmy McMullan – former skipper of Man. City and Scotland.

From my early days there was only one game for me – football. I hadn't the slightest inclination to take part in any other sport – if there was any other sport!

In those early days youngsters from all the towns and villages of Scotland played Soccer, and apart from a little advice which an onlooker might give, we coached ourselves. It was those schoolboy matches that were the beginning of a road that led me to the job as captain of Scotland and Manchester City.

What makes a good captain?

Well, if he takes instructions from the touchline, then he is a captain only by name. The management should have confidence in him and his job should not be merely to carry the ball and toss the coin.

I remember an incident when I skippered Manchester City. In one match things were not going too well for us and at half-time there was no score.

In the dressing room, I spoke to our manager, the late Mr. Peter Hodge, who listened to my suggestions. Then he said:

“If you honestly think you are right.... Carry on. You're the captain, Jimmy, and you have the feel of the game more than we have.”

City won that match 2-0.

I captained Manchester City for seven years and not once did I take instructions from the touchline.

Another important skill of a captain is his ability to see a weakness in the opposition and then get his team to hammer at the soft spot. This reminds me of one of the highlights of my career; the Wembley international of 1928 when Scotland beat England 5-1.

To captain that Scottish team – known as the 'Wembley Wizards' – was the greatest thrill of all. I've seen many fine teams in my time, and many great displays, but the exhibition given on that rainy day by the Scottish side was well-nigh perfect.

Before the match the critics didn't give Scotland much chance. Even the Scottish football writers couldn't see us holding our own against England. Height and weight, they said, were against us. But these two attributes can be nullified when the ball is kept on the ground.

Our plan was to attack, backed up by the wing-halves – Jimmy Gibson and myself. Our full-backs, Jimmy Nelson and Tommy Law, came up with us, leaving that big fellow, Tom 'Tiny' Bradshaw to dominate the middle. Thus each section backed up the one in front.

That day was a memorable one and I am very proud to have been one of the 'Wembley Wizards'.

Football would indeed be better today, if we had more of this.

There has been a lot of talk about coaching in recent years. In my younger days in Scotland we were so much in love with football that we practically coached ourselves. It was as a 13-year-old that I first took part in competitive football. A group of us banded together at school and entered a local Cup tournament for boys up to 15.

We went right through the competition and won it, scoring 29 goals with only one against. And of that young eleven five of us later played in professional football.

I know young players are being 'discovered' these days but not to the same extent as in the past. I wonder why?

Are there too many watching football instead of playing it?