

Football Eccentrics

A Goalkeeper Extraordinary

Even allowing for the fact that all goalkeepers are crazy, William 'Fatty' Foulke was crazier than most. Playing in the late 1800's and early 1900's Foulke was the heaviest player in the history of professional football. He stood 6ft 2 ½ inches tall and as his career progressed, he expanded from fifteen stone to a massive twenty-five stone. He wore size 12 boots and his shirts took 24in collars. Despite his size, he was remarkably agile. He was also blessed with a terrible temper.

He could punch the ball from his own goal to beyond the halfway line and, when the mood took him, was capable of inflicting similar damage upon opposing forwards. In the course of a career which encompassed Sheffield United, Chelsea, Bradford City and England, Foulke was involved in a number of unseemly accidents. In the 1898-99 season playing for Sheffield United, he picked up the Liverpool centre-forward George Allan, turned him upside down and stood him on his head in the penalty-area mud. The resultant penalty turned the course of the game and afterwards Foulke apologized to his team mates for his moment of madness before adding mischievously: 'I made a right toffee-apple out of him, didn't I?'

The 1902 FA Cup Final was decided by a controversial late goal. Sheffield United lost 2-1 to Southampton in a replay amid claims that the winning goal was offside. At the end of the game, Foulke was still fuming and, having torn off his kit in the dressing room, went searching for the referee Tom Kirkham. Luckily another official saw the unforgettable sight of twenty stone of naked flesh pounding the Crystal Palace corridors and told Kirkham to lock his door before Fatty Foulke could get to grips with him.

Foulke's sheer bulk created unexpected problems. He once stopped a game by snapping the crossbar, and if he was injured, it needed at least six men to carry him off as no stretcher was able to bear his weight. He used to say: 'I don't mind what they call me, as long as they don't call me late for lunch.' As if to underline the point, he once sat down at the dinner table before his Chelsea team-mates had arrived and proceeded to eat the food intended for the whole team.

When his career was over, he set up a penalty-kick business on Blackpool beach, charging a penny a shot and offering threepence back for each goal scored against him. Few youngsters would have got rich at the expense of 'Fatty Foulke'.