

'A schoolboy's dream come true ...'

Those  
were  
**THEIR**  
days



**YEOVIL 2**  
**SUNDERLAND 1**

by Basil  
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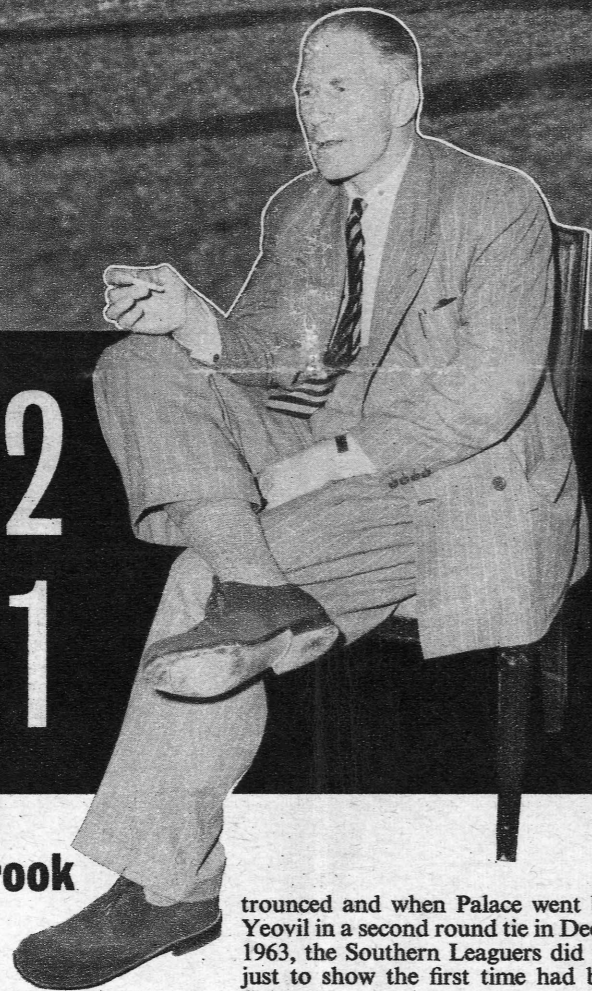
I HAVE waited 18 years to see something like it again, but I haven't yet—and perhaps I never shall. Yeovil Town, lying in the bottom six of the Southern League, met Sunderland of the First Division of the Football League, a team studded with great names of the period—Len Shackleton, Jackie Robinson, Willie Watson, Turnbull, Hall and Mapson and put them out of the F.A. Cup.

Yeovil Town 2, Sunderland 1—the prize, a tie with Manchester United in round 5. It wouldn't happen, not even in a schoolboy's dream, but it did and I was there to report it on January 29, 1949.

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Yeovil Town have been beating Football League clubs for more than a generation. Back in the days when it was just a Somerset country town with winding streets and one set of traffic lights they played host to Crystal Palace, Exeter City and Liverpool in the F.A. Cup on the canting ground of Huish, a mere two minutes walk from the heart of the main hotels and shops.

Palace and Exeter were properly



DICKIE  
DYKE  
(above)  
warding  
off a  
Sunderland  
raid. Below,  
Bill Murray,  
Sunderland  
manager.  
Defeat  
didn't put  
him off  
eating.

trounced and when Palace went back to Yeovil in a second round tie in December, 1963, the Southern Leaguers did it again just to show the first time had been no fluke.

Liverpool overcame the much publicised slope, which in reality is more of a tilt at one corner of the pitch than anything else, but Yeovil still succeeded in scoring twice against the famous Merseyside team.

In the 30 years since those days "The Glovers" (they take their nickname from a local industry), have battled through to the competition proper many times, meeting clubs from all four divisions.

Manchester United, Bury, Bournemouth, Colchester United, Chesterfield, Southend United—You name 'em and it

BLIZZARD . . . he made Stock's goal.

SHACKLETON . . . perfect pass to wrong man.

pulled a muscle and was little more than a passenger for the rest of the match.

Yet, against all the odds, Yeovil kept coming. Mapson conceded a corner, Keeton put a vicious drive only inches too high. The mishap to Hargreaves was simply ignored.

Then Yeovil got another kidney punch. The burly Bryant bundled Mapson with the ball over the line. Instead of a goal, the referee awarded Sunderland a free kick.

Surely, we thought, Sunderland would soon now find their rhythm and turn the world right side up again. The strange thing was we were still waiting when, in the 28th minute, Yeovil put the ball into Sunderland's net again and this time there was not the shadow of doubt about it.

### Yeovil went to meet the ball

Centre-half Les Blizzard lobbed a mid-field free kick to inside-left Alex Wright. He slipped a waist-high ball to player-manager Alec Stock who swivelled on his right leg and smashed a beautiful shot well to the left of the vainly plunging Mapson.

Yeovil from the kick-off had gone to meet the ball whereas Sunderland waited for it to come to them.

Now, the First Division men were deservedly in arrears as a result. The main anxiety was Dyke, but although obviously raw he was a big, fearless fellow with an unruffled temperament, and the occasion, far from leaving him over-awed, inspired him.

He made a succession of fine saves but then, with 62 minutes play and the score unchanged, his missed a long ball into the goalmouth by full-back Barney Ramsden and Robinson tapped it over the line for the easiest goal of his life.

Human destiny depends upon chance to an astonishing degree. At the end of 90 minutes the score stood at 1-1.

Normally, this would have meant a

replay at Roker Park and a very different story, but this was the final post-war season when extra time applied to original ties if they were drawn.

This was done to avoid unnecessary travel and loss of time in the years when our economy was struggling to overcome the austerity caused by the long, lost years of the second World War.

So we settled down to a further half hour, and now we felt convinced that the superior stamina of the full-time First Division cracks would tell.

As the extra period began, thick mist enveloped the ground. Now there was a new matter to consider, the distinct possibility that this historic match would be abandoned on a heart-breaking note of anti-climax for Yeovil. If it was, surely Yeovil would never play so well a second time, or Sunderland so badly?

Suddenly, it lifted and with only seconds remaining to the end of the first period of extra time, it revealed Shackleton with the ball on the half-way line. Shackleton, the man who was dubbed "the Clown Prince of Soccer", Shackleton a ball juggler with few equals in the history of the game, Shackleton, as mercurial and unpredictable a man as he was a player.

I can see him now jiggling that ball up on his instep. He was facing his own goal. He could turn with it and dribble or pass; he could hook it out to either wing; he could pass back or belt it into the crowd.

Any one of these things he could have done and Sunderland would probably have escaped with a replay. But being "Shack" he tried an overhead kick to his centre-forward. Nine times out of ten, being "Shack", he would have succeeded, but this was the exception.

He caught the ball with the toe of his boot and it flew straight up the middle towards his own goal—a perfect through-pass for Wright, the Yeovil inside-left. Wright gathered it to him greedily, paused and then pushed it into the path of the onrushing Bryant, thundering up

like the Wells Fargo Stage. Mapson started to come out but Eric Bryant hit it sweetly and truly into the net.

*It was a moment I shall remember until my dying day, and so, I imagine, will most people who were at Huish on that day 18 years ago.*

But this was not the end—oh no, far from it. A further 15 minutes of extra time had to be played and that quarter-of-an-hour seemed almost as bad as being roasted over a slow fire.

At last, Sunderland shook off their lethargy and Yeovil, physically handicapped and spent, reeled back in the face of withering attacks. The Press was by now as wildly and unashamedly partisan as the home fans. Never did minutes tick away with such agonising slowness. Then the mist rolled down again.

For Yeovil it was a race against time, whichever way they looked at it. Three minutes left and one final piece of irony threatened to rob Yeovil of a victory torn straight from the pages of pulp fiction.

The referee blew for a free kick to Sunderland just outside the Yeovil penalty area. The crowd thought it was the final whistle and over the railings they came in their thousands.

*Within seconds the pitch looked like one of those 1923 photographs of the first Wembley Final, when the public stormed the gates. It seemed Yeovil might be robbed of their triumph by the hysteria of their own supporters.*

Somehow, the Yeovil players, arms waving like maniacs, pleading, cajoling, threatening, got the crowd back behind the barriers and the last three minutes were played out.

When the final whistle did blow and there was no mistake about the nationally sensational news of Yeovil's victory a great many people remained in their seats and places, drained of all emotion, just staring in front of them as if in a trance. Leslie "Tiger" Smith of the Press Association was so shaken that he left his shaving kit on the ground!

### They didn't come out to eat

Reaction hit Sunderland on the express from Yeovil Junction to Waterloo. The players did not come into the dining car. But their manager Bill Murray was not so shattered as to forgo his dinner. With a slightly sour grin he jerked his thumb behind him and said—"they've locked themselves in."

He said a lot of other things, but the passing of the years have robbed them of point and sting.

The triumph of Yeovil's band of part-timers, a collection of publicans, glove cutters, clerks, warehousemen and what have you, lives on and will do so as long as a ball is kicked in these islands.

ONE CANNOT BE SURE, BUT IT WOULD NOT SURPRISE ME IF THE JUDGEMENT OF HISTORY WILL ONE DAY SELECT THIS AS THE GREATEST OF ALL FOOTBALL'S IMMORTAL TALES.