

The Football Game That Makes Me Cry

“An ex-soldier, his wife, and three children were found in a room, the only furniture consisting of a mattress for them to lie on. They were in a state of starvation. This is an educated man willing to take on any sort of work”

(Manchester Guardian - Monday 31st January 1921)



Man City vs Man Utd at the Etihad 2019

Source: Author's Collection

Women's Football Superstars

Saturday 7th September 2019 found an excited dad and his two teenage sons (not excited and not interested) on his way to see the legends of the game, at a beautiful Stadium in front of a 30,000 plus crowd. Back in the 1921 'golden year' of women's football my granny's team St Helens had been watched by ¼ million spectators: 27 games at an average of approx 10,000... Even then, there weren't many games at 30,000 or over and there have been precious few in the intervening century since the FA ban. We had a hotel which quite by chance was at the other end of 'curry mile' and as well as the football the boys had to listen to me reminisce about visiting my mates at University and eating awesome curries without utensils. Even having a pint I sat below a beautiful print of the long lost Fallowfield Stadium where many magnificent women's football matches had taken place over the years. The game was fun (bit of a neutral!) and I managed to get my programme signed by the Jill Scott and the Ellen White - woohoo!



Bath Ladies FC (Guess which player had the nickname 'Tiny'?)
Source: British Newspaper Archive

Women's Football in Manchester - 100 Years

When I first read that the game in Manchester was to have an 'incredible' attendance of 30,000 plus I remembered that Manchester had previously hosted a game with a reputed attendance of 31,000. This game was played on Saturday 8th January 1921 and the Dick Kerr Ladies beat the Bath Ladies by 12 goals to nil. The game was played at Old Trafford so first bragging rights to the red half of Manchester/The Globe... In one sense this game was just one of many, many thrashings inflicted by the superstar Dick Kerr Ladies in 1921. However, I had also researched the Bath Ladies and there is a bit more to that game. Bath Ladies had been trying for months to get a game against the Dick Kerr Ladies and were delighted even to have been beaten so heavily. They tried very hard to get a return game but Alfred Frankland wanted a couple of high profile games at Bristol City's Stadium to make the trip worthwhile and it didn't happen. They raised £2,000 for the Unemployed Ex-Servicemen's Fund in Manchester which was a vast amount of money in those days.

**EX-SERVICE MEN AND
THEIR FAMILIES.**

**HUNDREDS STARVING IN
MANCHESTER.**

Source: Newspapers.com

Starving on the Streets of Manchester

This is the headline which 'grabbed me by the throat' and still does. In all my thousands of hours of women's football research nothing has brought home to me the horror of what was faced by those brave men, women and children after the war and the direct role those magnificent women footballers had in literally saving lives. I am actually finding this quite difficult to write. The article goes on to say that 8,000 applications had been made for food parcels and that it had only been possible to grant relief to the 700 families who were actually starving. This is over two years after the end of the war and in one of our major cities.

"It will be remembered that when the men were in the trenches the public of Manchester and Salford came forward and sent them out parcels of food. We would suggest that these men are fighting a worse enemy - namely, starvation."

(Manchester Guardian - Monday 31st January 1921)

"An ex-service man's wife was confined on Christmas Day, and gave birth to twins. This man is without any pension or unemployment pay, and both woman and children were practically dying through lack of nourishment."

(Manchester Guardian - Monday 31st January 1921)



**Lizzy Ashcroft, tbc, Andree Gauckler, Margaret Thornborough, Lily Parr
Dick Kerr + Cadettes de Gascogne Legends Still raising money in the 1930s
Source: Authors Collection**

Strong Independent Women and Life Savers

I know quite a bit about the history of women's football. I have of course been aware that the great majority of the games pre-WW2 were to raise money for good causes. This in many ways has been an intellectual exercise with the occasional deeper, emotional tug from an article. However, rarely I have been so viscerally connected to the outcome of one particular game and this next sentence really brought it home. "The very small amount of money that was raised by the football match is practically exhausted, and the Committee are quite powerless to render any further help unless the public will come to their assistance". This takes the issue from head to heart. I read this article several months ago and it shocked me like no other article. Hopefully it made me think and appreciate what I have. This link of one football game to starving babies on the streets of Manchester sheds a new light for me on the role of my granny and those magnificent women. Athletes, footballers, strong independent women and life-savers. It makes me so proud of my relative.

It was only 10 months later that they would be banned from using magnificent stadia like Old Trafford...

**Steve Bolton
June 2020**