

How Blackburn Rovers won the Cup Five times in Eight seasons

AS football fans in general scarcely need to be reminded, Blackburn Rovers are among the oldest of the clubs. Also, as even a casual glance at any book which records these things plainly tells, they have a high place among the famous, with successes to their credit almost beyond dreams.

Before referring to them, let me insert a stray personal thought. One of the things which always intrigues—even fascinates—as I reflect on the experiences of these famous clubs is the number of links which connect old times with the present problems. The story of Blackburn Rovers contains several such links.

Take a simple but at the same time an important point by way of a start. In these days the managers of many clubs puzzle over the problem of how to get the players in their charge to reveal, consistently, their true form on the grounds of their opponents.

In the very early days of the Rovers this problem didn't arise, for one all-sufficient reason. They had a football club, but no ground of their own. For a couple of seasons or so all the matches were played on the grounds of their miscellaneous opponents. In those regular away games the club was strikingly successful.

They went right through one season without defeat. In due course they did get a ground of their own—a farm field was rented on the Preston New Road. It was nothing to boast about. Around the centre of the pitch was a deep cow-pit which, instead of being filled in, was covered with wooden planks, which in turn were concealed with a precarious layer of sods. The stories about the happenings on that farmers field can be passed over, especially as I have a feeling that with the telling of them through the years the facts have got all mixed up with fiction.

A Cup Final Hat-trick

Strangely, in this district of Lancashire where professionalism was born and nurtured—despite the regulations against such—the Rovers officials were opposed

to the idea as “being against the best interests of the game.” The players were mostly local lads, but on their own grounds and elsewhere the Rovers built up a reputation for being among the best lot in the land, and in 1882 the day of days dawned. The Rovers went to the Cup Final.

In those times, and for a considerable period subsequently, there was a football custom which seems to have died a natural death—that of printing In Memoriam cards prior to a big do. This was the wording on the cards relating to the Rovers' first Cup Final:

All Hail yet gallant Rover lads!

Etonians think you are but cads.

They founds at football

fame their “dads”,

In meeting Blackburn Rovers.

The sequel suggests that at least the printers of the cards, if not the Blackburn players themselves, were over-confident. On that historic occasion the Rovers were beaten by the Old Etonians.

In the following season another club with its home in the same town—Blackburn Olympic—took the Cup to this Lancashire football stronghold by beating the Old Etonians in the final tie. What happened to Blackburn Olympic afterwards doesn't matter much. What does matter is that forthwith the Rovers started on a hat-trick performance which has never been equalled—that of winning the F.A. Cup three times in succession.

On the first two occasions their opponents, Queen's Park, came all the way from Glasgow, but to complete their three wins in a row the Rovers had to meet West Bromwich Albion twice, winning the replay by two goals to nil.

A Goal-scorer's Secret

Three seasons went by, and again the Rovers came into the forefront of the picture as Cup-fighters, apparently not worrying unduly about the League, which had come into existence, and of which the Rovers, now installed at Ewood Park, were among the original twelve.

Sheffield Wednesday were beaten by six goals to one in the 1890 final, and Notts